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THE BYRONIC TEUTON

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Aspects of German Pessimism
1800—1933

by
CEDRIC HENTSCHEL



METHUEN & CO. LTD., LONDON
36 Essex Street, Strand, W.C.2

First published in 1940

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

FOREWORD

THE unity of this book lies in the delineation in German literature, between 1800 and 1933, of certain ideas and emotions, conjointly—and perhaps arbitrarily—defined, in the first chapter, as “Byronism.” Accordingly, I do not claim to have written an outline of German Pessimism, within the given period, but merely to have stressed the psychological implications of pessimism, as reflected in modern German literature. This explains what must otherwise be deemed a grave lack of proportion, inasmuch as many authors have been dealt with, not perhaps for their most important contributions to art, but only in so far as some—possibly the least significant—portion of their output, can be equated with the concept of “Byronism.” Hence, the chary treatment allotted to Nietzsche, Wagner, and Schopenhauer, and the consideration of but a tiny fraction of the plays of Ernst Toller, and Georg Kaiser.

On the other hand, in the later chapters, some scant attention has been bestowed on admittedly second-rate authors, because their work often reveals the essence of Byronism more fitly, than do the comments of abler writers. Thus Sacher-Masoch, with all the limitations of monomania, yet throws a clear light on the mechanism of his disease.

None of the present matter has hitherto been printed, except for a shortened version of Chap. IV. (Cp. *German Life and Letters*, January 1938.) The core of the

book is a thesis, *The Byronic Superman in England and Germany*, which I prepared, under the guidance of Professor I. A. Willoughby. The stubborn, factual matrix has, since, I hope, been suitably leavened.

I am indebted to the University of London Publication Fund, for a grant towards printing expenses, likewise, to René Quinault, for assisting with the proofs.

C. H.

University College,

W C 1.

June, 1939

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*“Toi, dont le monde encore ignore le vrai nom,
Esprit mystérieux, mortel, ange, ou démon,
Qui que tu sois, Byron bon ou fatal génie,
J’aime de tes concerts la sauvage harmonie
Le mal est ton spectacle, et l’homme est ta victime
Ton ail, comme Satan, a mesuré l’abîme,
Et ton âme, y plongeant loin du jour et de Dieu,
A dit à l’espérance un éternel adieu!
Comme lui, maintenant, régner dans les ténèbres,
Ton génie invincible éclate en chants funèbres,
Il triomphe, et ta voix sur un mode infernal,
Chante l’hymne de gloire au sombre dieu du mal”*

ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE, *L’Homme* (1819)

Chapter I

BYRONIC PERSPECTIVES

*Protean pessimism—Byron's fame in England and Europe contrasted
—Definition of the Byronic Man—Theories of his provenance*

“WE have passed,” Michael Arlen informs us, “through almost a decade of ‘disenchantment,’ which is the fashionable word for the dread disease that afflicts hope. It is no use trying to call it ‘disappointment,’ for there is a fashion in words of suffering.” Thus the record of human tribulation at least boasts the merit of variety. *tedium vitae*, *accidie*, *melancholia*, *Weltschmerz*, *mal du siècle*, spleen, nihilism, “the blues”—here are but a few of the terms, employed in varying epochs of European civilization, to connote a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with life. The historian, in his eagerness to classify, sometimes differentiates these ailments too much, their external forms may vary, according to the exigencies of the particular century in which they arise, yet, fundamentally, these treasons to our earthly dispensation are akin. Achilles sulking in his tent, Heinrich von Melk at meditation in the cloister, Hamlet torn with self-debate, Byron fiercely morose and Schopenhauer cynically observant, represent facets of a unique Martyrdom of Man.

Melancholy is as old as the hills. Doubtless it began as an unsubtle, animal misery; the contrition of a Job. But

in the course of the last two thousand years, and especially in the last three hundred, it has been refined into a thing of bewildering moods and complexities. Like suicide, it thrives on an advanced civilization. And it has become insistently vocal. The Greeks knew melancholy, but left it for later generations to turn into a fetish. They held it a grave social solecism, to air their private griefs in public. Yet the Greek tragedians did not ignore the darker states of the soul, while Aristotle deemed every intelligent man subject to melancholy. Yet deeper Pyrrhonian depths were plumbed by Marcus Aurelius.

In the Middle Ages, Christianity, through reform movements such as that of Cluny, cast a pall of resignation over the larger part of Europe. But the cry *memento mori*, led to pleasure-seeking as well as to penance. At the same time, the importation into England and Germany of French and Provençal love-lyrics, brought an added complication to the western tradition of melancholy. Medieval lovers were not exclusively given to blithe carolling; they knew the whole gamut of erotic emotion, from ecstasy to despair. So the characteristic literary nexus was established, between sombre yearning and unsatisfied passion. In Germany, towards the end of the twelfth century, Reinmar von Hagenau even practised a refined Byronism in his cult of love-sorrow. His use of terms such as *trûren* and *senede leit* ("sorrow of yearning"), are significant; they became technical expressions, indispensable to the elegant amorist. Thus early was the fabric of modern melancholy established, rooted either in a religious, or in an erotic despondency, or in both.

The Renaissance, though primarily an age of glorious affirmation, did not escape unscathed. At times, Shakespeare himself viewed life as "a tale told by an idiot." All

epochs of individualism are indeed peculiarly subject to bouts of pessimism. But the gloom of the Elizabethans was in part affected, amongst courtiers it was considered a mark of gentility. Ever since, the melancholiac has stood in danger of being held a mere *poseur*. The fashionable sorrows of the Elizabethan aristocrat can hardly be paralleled in Germany. German noblemen of the day had little of the finesse of the Latins. Though some obtained glimpses of Humanism in the universities of northern Italy, they mostly remained the type of the crude robber-knight. Admirable in his way, a figure like Ulrich von Hutten lacks the graces of his more notable English contemporaries.

In the Age of the Reformation, artisans and merchants, not the decadent nobility, were the true representatives of German culture. In a powerful engraving he executed in 1514, Albrecht Dürer depicted Melancholy as an allegorical figure. Though there is some evidence that Dürer was influenced by classical sources, his *Melencolia I* is above all an embodiment of the criminal sloth which often haunted the medieval mind; then as now, *accidie* ("apathy"), was one of the cardinal sins.

In the seventeenth century, German literature stood beneath the fiery ægis of the Thirty Years' War; with the help of the pen, as well as of the sword, lust and carnage ran riot, while the few writers who discussed milder themes, produced poor stuff in comparison with the metaphysical subtlety of their English rivals, and above all with the rich harvest of Burton. Nevertheless, there are some curious parallels between Baroque bombast, and Byronic frenzy. In the eighteenth century, as Sentiment and Reason came into conflict, the world, if less blatantly gloomy, remained equally problematical, so that with the advancing intellectualization of the German

middle classes, their literature became predominantly introspective.

The study of Sensibility in German letters between 1750 and 1800 is a vast topic. The English reader will find an illuminating analysis in W. Rose's *From Goethe to Byron*. Rousseau and Richardson became German idols; but native interest in the subject is attested by several figures like the Swiss medico J. G. von Zimmermann, whose *Solitude* (1756), is a repository of curious information, not at all deserving Lamb's unkind gibe¹. The egocentric, literary debauch we know as Storm and Stress, proved a frothy prelude to the dignity of Weimar Classicism, and the mature achievements of Goethe and Schiller. But Goethe himself suffered fiery baptism in the earlier movement, and his eccentric contemporary, the lackadaisical, and effeminate Jean Paul, never escaped its bitter-sweet legacy.

About the year 1800, we are told, *Weltschmerz*—the word was first employed in this sense by Jean Paul—underwent a change of texture. Theory claims that the failure of the French Revolution startled writers out of an exclusive pre-occupation with their own immediacies, into a larger awareness of cosmic mystery. Poets now suppressed their private misfortunes, in order to bewail the hard lot of Mankind. As a corollary, many *Weltschmerzler* became entangled in some social reform. Occasionally, such altruism proved a remedy for personal woes, but it is false to suggest that egocentric *Weltschmerz* was replaced by the cosmic brand. For the most part cosmic *Weltschmerz* proved an additional, rather than an emancipating grief.

It was in the troubled aftermath of the Revolution, and the Napoleonic campaigns, that Lord Byron startled the

¹ The Notes are printed collectively on pp 217-18

world by his impudent commingling of satiric and idyllic strains. The present age, with its many parallels to the England of 1820, has helped to resuscitate the Byronic spirit. But the Englishman of to-day attends a school where Byron is ignored, and a university where he is only tolerated. It is not therefore surprising if he thinks of the poet—if at all—as a scandalous lover who drank his wine out of a monk's skull. How different is the legend of Byron outside his native land!

Byron's art was not merely hailed with enthusiasm in Greece, France, and Germany. He blazed an intellectual trail from Spain to Russia—from Espronceda to Pushkin. His style was even sedulously imitated in the nascent literatures of South America! The sceptic may retort that this popularity was due to the glamour of Byron the man, rather than to any merit of Byron the artist. Yet we find that Byron's cast of thought exercised an irresistible fascination over many intellectuals of standing. Thanks to this witchcraft, Georg Brandes, the Dane, lauds *Manfred* as "the only poem of our century which bears comparison with Goethe's *Faust*." Adolf Stern in a German history of literature, written in 1892, even asserts that Byron is "the greatest English writer of the nineteenth century, and at the same time the thinker whose influence on the whole development of modern letters was the profoundest and most far-reaching." And however much we discountenance Professor Stern's first statement, we would find it difficult to disprove his second.

In his motherland, despite the eulogies of Matthew Arnold and Ruskin, Byron still suffers the fate of the renegade. The centenary of his death in 1924 released an avalanche of largely second-hand material from the presses, though Harold Nicolson's *Byron, The Last Journey* forms a noteworthy exception. Even this work

however is anecdotal rather than analytical, it is part of Byron's tragedy that he is still judged for his showmanship rather than for his achievements. Both in France and Germany, stimulating biographies have been published since the War—by André Maurois, and Kasimir Edschmid, the apostle of Expressionism. These two books have been translated into English. Perhaps this is a token of a tardy re-awakening of interest in the most unorthodox of England's ambassadors.

Admittedly, the deference paid to Byron abroad does not always spring from disinterested motives. Too often, his verse is regarded as a convenient cudgel wherewith to belabour England at large, and to damn "English prudence and social hypocrisy." The quotation is once more from Professor Stern, but it occurs in a thousand variant forms in the countless foreign monographs dealing with Byron. More discerning critics behold in Childe Harold, a pilgrim who transcends national rivalries—a symbol of mankind itself. Thus, Goethe's interest in Byron was but one aspect of his preoccupation with the question of "Weltliteratur."

The Byronic Hero, a reflection of Byron's own tortuous personality, is not, on first acquaintance, a very attractive figure. Something in Byron's tawdry composition, some spark of genuine nobility hidden beneath his attitudinizing, does nevertheless appeal deeply to the bosoms of men. Though responsible for many of the disasters that befell him, he was fundamentally unfortunate in his parentage: he came of ill-starred stock. Byron was a constitutional neuropath whose malady was accelerated, though scarcely caused, by environmental factors. He was frantically egocentric.

That notwithstanding he took some interest in social affairs, and even endeavoured to play a part in politics,

was only a symptom of his forlorn efforts to rationalize his ego, and so break its ever tightening bonds. Byron was probably more attracted by past than present history; his individualism at least resembled that of Goethe, in that it sought symbols for itself amid the glamorous welter of bygone events. Nero and Sardanapalus were as real to him as Napoleon or Wellington. The canker of his negative world-view was so virulent, that in contemplating the opposition of contemporary political forces, he was unable to visualize a clear gain on any one front resulting from their contention: the despot himself was ultimately as much a dupe as his tool! If stress be laid on environment, then the awakening of the natural sciences during the Byronic epoch, with its attendant cosmic revelations, should receive as much consideration as Metternich and the incubus of Absolutism. The blank vistas of geological time could but sharpen Byron's innate pessimism; Cuvier's discoveries were but one more proof of a chaotic universe, indeed, Byron was apt to transfer this cosmic violence to the microcosm of heroic passion, where welling lava and volcanic eruptions became symbols of emotional excesses.

Fit vehicle for these Titanic passions was the Noble Outlaw, the gentleman turned pirate or corsair—a familiar figure since Lucifer, and well known in German literature since Schiller's *Rauber*. Byron may have received a hint here from the Swiss writer Zschokke. But the velleity to play pirate was inborn: Byron possessed that fatal accompaniment of the Romantic spirit, the reluctance to reach sedate maturity. In the last resort, the Byronic Hero is a tripartite individual: he is the type of the satanic, sadistic dandy. In so far as he is satanic, he is a descendant of Prometheus-Lucifer; in so far as he is a sadist, he stands in the shadow of "the Divine Marquis",

as a dandy, he manifests a fastidious exhibitionism. If some unifying principle be sought for this dubious trinity, then it must be found, in the easily bantered, but perplexing phrase, "dæmonic personality." The Dæmonic forms the core in which the sadistic, satanic, and dandiacal elements have their roots.

The Byronic life-rhythm oscillates between grave and gay, with the irrelevance of a Hungarian czardas, fierce outbreaks of passion alternate with dull, brutish stupor. This sloth might be interpreted as satiety, but generally it points rather to a lack of vitality. In intercourse with his fellow-men, a Byronic figure may perhaps unburden his soul, only to relapse once more into a gloomy taciturnity. Reserve is indeed more characteristic of him than self-revelation. Clinging ardently to his belief in his own "otherness," he is bound to fear misunderstanding. This morbid egoism may reach a pitch, where the Byronic Man believes in it as a principle existing beyond Good and Evil. Self-preoccupied, he is bound to sacrifice love to self-love. His face, "furrowed by an ancient grief," generally tells of sexual shipwreck.

The Byronic Hero frequently succumbs to ennui. No doubt, this feeling of satiety is in part the conscious pose of a dandy, but it is also the result of a genuine *Weltschmerz*. According to Charles du Bos, the sudden outbursts of passion which enliven the apathy of the Byronic Man, are not the outcome of dæmonic necessity, but rather, a kind of hot-house growth: they are emotions artificially stimulated by an agent aware of his impotence in the sphere of feeling. This paradox of energy arising from inertia is attractively formulated, and gives a more palpably satisfying explanation of the staccato nature of Byronic actions, than does the alternative resort to the mystic concept—Dæmonism. Byron, it would seem,

sought in emotional stress a refuge from rationalism. His aim was identical with Lara's:

*"his feelings sought
In that intentness an escape from thought."*

The Man of Feeling in Byron was often provoked to a semblance of life, in order to quell the philosopher; in his fits of pseudo-passion, Byron wished to ban the dæmon of logic.

The dandy of our tripartite definition of the Byronic Man, calls for further analysis. Though Byron was born in the age of Beau Brummell, he saw the dandy in no limited historical perspective. This is proved by his choice of Sardanapalus as hero for his little-known drama of that name. Technically mediocre, *Sardanapalus* (1821), is nevertheless a cultural document of some significance. It is noteworthy that this Assyrian king, who dressed as a woman, and made lavish use of cosmetics, should have fascinated Byron, especially in view of the later hermaphrodite ideals prevalent amongst French and English decadent authors. Byron's vision of his hero could equally well have been penned in 1890:

*" . . . amidst the damsels,
As femininely garbed, and scarce less female,
The grandson of Semiramis, the Man-Queen—
He comes."*

Moreover, the consummation of the love of Sardanapalus and Myrrha—their joint mounting of the funeral pyre—smacks already of that masochistic cult of sterility, which became inseparable from the hermaphrodite ideal. The "Man-Queen," this sub-species of the Byronic Man, may therefore be regarded as a forerunner both of the Fatal

Woman and of the languid heroes of Swinburne. The Byronic dandy is thus more than a mere fop. In his fascinating monograph, *Du dandysme et de Georges Brummell*, Barbey d'Aurevilly has probed deeper than most critics into the arcana of the dandy's psychology. The dandy, he asserts, strives to attract attention, but—"le plus beau des étonnements, c'est l'épouvante." It is thus but a step from sartorial to sadistic pleasure! In addition, the dandy is basically akin to the type of the Fallen Angel: Lucifer was the first aristocrat! That so acute a mind as d'Aurevilly's should discover a sadistic component in dandyism, shows the purely schematic nature of our triune interpretation of the Byronic Hero. The coalescence of the sadist, the dandy, and the fallen angel is complete; they fructify each other at all points by a kind of intellectual capillarity.

The sadistic element in Byron's work is large, and it assumes varied forms. In his *Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt claims that Byron "hallows in order to desecrate." Apart from the undiluted sadism in a passage such as the description of Sir Ezzelin's murder by Lara—with its gruesome medley of suggestive reticence and bald objectivity—Byron also reveals his will to sadism under the thin disguise of vampirism, in his fondness for ruins as a poetic backcloth (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is a necrophilistic orgy), and in certain tricks of style, such as his studied application of the metaphor of the gladiator to his heroes. Had Byron striven wholeheartedly for inner equilibrium, he might have asserted like de Sade, that not Good but Evil is the axis of the universe, and that consequently, to do evil is merely to live in harmony with the world-spirit! But his sadism never found conscious expression in so lucid a philosophical system, instead it sought more devious outlets.

The third member of the Byronic trinity is the descendant of Prometheus-Lucifer. Cain and Ahasuerus could with equal justification be included among his prototypes. The element common to all these four figures is the idea of rebellion against God. The consequences of that rebellion reveal many parallels with the psyche of the Byronic Man. The most notable are the conviction of having originally possessed superhuman goodness and innocence, secondly therefore, a feeling of quasi-equality with the Deity, from which an assumption of superiority leading to open revolt, is but one step removed (*Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse*), then, the realization that personal guilt has resulted in exclusion from the former paradise, and lastly, either a sense of utter contrition, accompanied by intense yearning for the old state of innocence, or else, a perverse and exultant wallowing in the present mire.

When the Byronic Man entered Germany, he was absorbed with all his paradoxical complexities, and as a result of further accretions became even less easy to pigeon-hole. But of the major trinity of Byronic Men, one, the dandy, found it difficult to obtain access. The dandy is almost invariably a gentleman, and a German has stated: "The English will always be fools, and we shall never be gentlemen." However this may be, the dandy has looked in vain for German recruits, the Teuton may give tongue to sublime, metaphysical utterance, but he generally lacks the more concrete, sublunar graces. Excepting the obsolescent Junker, he will dress for choice like Hitler and Lord Nuffield, rather than like General Goring and Lord Byron. Despite dreams of a Nordic Aristocracy, he is imperishably lower middle class. Characteristically, of the two German-speaking dandies whose careers are sketched in this book, one,

Lassalle, was a Jew, while Prince von Pückler-Muskau was of Hungarian descent.

In the past century, Byronism has so profoundly influenced the development of the European soul, that it is tempting to discuss its root causes. The critic of "pure" literature, uncontaminated by other disciplines, does not here offer much guidance. The doctor, sociologist, and anthropologist are more serviceable. And of late, the ethnologist's voice has been heard.

Byron's art displays two qualities which Havelock Ellis has defined as "Celtic": a haunting desire for the remote combined, somewhat surprisingly, with a vivid sense for picturesque detail. The poet may have inherited these traits from his Scottish mother. But we can hardly label the Byronic Man "Celtic," and leave it at that. The Celt, though more temperamental, is not more subject than the Nordic to melancholy of the Byronic variety. Nor is it correct that the English in general (a conglomerate of Nordic and Mediterranean tribes), are peculiarly receptive to pessimism. Abroad, the legend of the sour Briton is hard to kill. But nearly every northern country is in like case. The sorrows of the Russian are frequently caricatured. Ireland and Poland both deem themselves "a Christ among the nations." Henrik Pontoppidan has given "the gloomy Dane" a national significance, in his novel *Lykke-Per*. The theory of race must accordingly be subordinated to wider, environmental factors. This is true even in the case of the Slav mind, so liable to Byronic infection. The mystical Slav, whose day-dreams may be those of an angel or an idiot, is ultimately a sociological, rather than a racial concept. It is, however, of importance for our present theme that Slavonic blood should predominate in Germany, "Slav" nostalgia does much to explain the triumphal progress of

Byronism in that country. Of all the German and Austrian authors enumerated in these pages, hardly one could pass muster as a representative Nordic type. Here is an appropriate reason for the eclipse of Byronism in Germany since 1933!

Though not specifically Celtic, Nordic, or Slav, Byronism may at least be a *northern* phenomenon. Possibly, the northerner inherits with his mother's milk a tendency to "look on the black side of things." If frustrated, he is more prone than the southerner to listless resignation, he will magnify rather than turn a blind eye upon objective evils, he reiterates all the unanswerable questions with inspired stubbornness; to cap all, he is convinced that in the last resort each must face his fate alone, without the assurance given by mob solidarity. Is the brave despondency to which countless Germans and Englishmen are heir, perhaps the inevitable accompaniment of an Atlantic climate? The earthy sanity, and breezy good humour of the fog-bound Dutch would seem to belie this theory.

Henri Taine, in his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, develops an explanation of Byronism that combines race with religion. He believes that Byronism is a renaissance of the northern, pagan spirit which has survived centuries of Christian domination. *The Vision of Judgement* is the logical continuation of the *Edda*! Thus Taine. But the Byronic Man, though nearly always anti-Christian, is a modern, not a pagan individualist. He holds no more truck with outworn Teutonic divinities, than with orthodox Christianity. He generally has a private religion which has gone awry. He is the disbeliever in search of belief: "one way of knowing God is to deny Him."

The economists and sociologists have also probed the mystery of Byronism. To the Left Wing economist,

Byronism is one of the fatal concomitants of capitalism. This is partly true. There is some correlation between the increase of *Weltschmerz* in the last three hundred years, and the growth of a leisured class. At top and bottom of the fabric of capitalist society, exist people who from the fact of their favoured birth, or else through the stringency of unemployment, receive an overdose of leisure. If temperamentally thereto inclined, they may then fall a prey to Byronism. This does not make capitalism responsible for Byronism, any more than the captain of a ship is responsible for the melancholy that may overtake some of his passengers, during the forced inactivity of a long sea voyage. The Left Wing theory of Byronism does however account, in part, for the social gulf that so often separates men of Byronic temperament. The Byronic Man rarely emerges from a *milieu* of comfortable, middle class stability. He is either a man of wealth like Lassalle, or an aristocrat like Platen and Pückler-Muskau—or else, at the other end of the scale, an impecunious, pot-house reveller like Grabbe. His dandyism is now the grand manner of the Upper Ten, now the desperate theatricals of the low-born *arriviste*.

Medical men have found much matter for speculation in the Byronic Man. They have advanced theories of his woes which often compel, though they may not appeal, since they generally assume the supremacy of matter over mind. The dietician sees the cause of Byron's misfortunes in his curious régime of alternate fasting and over-indulgence "man ist, was man isst!" The endocrinologist views Byronism as a phase of the "pituitary personality." The psychiatrist would regard the Byronic Man as afflicted, if not with megalomania, at least with some form of paranoia. A Nietzsche lies embedded in nearly every Byronic character.

At this juncture, the investigation of the origins of Byronism becomes more personal. Can one imagine Byron without his lame foot? His awkward gait, so crucially at variance with the proud carriage of the god-like head, was a lifelong source of misery to him. Even his mother, in her not infrequent fits of drunken passion, had called him a "lame brat," and it was his boyish gawkiness, emphasized by his physical handicap, which had lost him Mary Chaworth, the first great love of his life. Her memory was to haunt him inexorably. Physical abnormality was for Byron so tragic a thing, that he even made it the theme of his drama, *The Deformed Transformed*. Was Byron, despite his claim to a proud and ancient title, despite his squandered wealth, despite the *blasé* pose acquired on his travels, and for all his indefectible literary success, perhaps the victim of one of the blackest of inferiority-complexes? If this were indeed so, it would give a simple explanation of why the Byronic figure considers himself the victim of cosmic injustice. It would explain further, why the specific form taken by his misfortune is so often that of ill-success in love; and why, when he struts and poses, he can rarely be a genuine lover of the highest. For he is but the ghost of a superman, a bloated product of over-compensation.

Many of Byron's literary kin share their exemplar's handicap in physique. "The Dutch Byron," Bilderdijk, was likewise lame. Leopardi, whose indictment of existence outvies Byron's, was a deformed cripple, as well as poverty-stricken. The private grief which sets up a Byronic ferment in its owner's mind is not always physical in nature, though apart from actual disease and malformation, it often takes the form of dipsomania and sexual perversion. Frequently however, Byronic behaviour is focused round an exclusively intellectual problem in religion or metaphysics.

Yet, ultimately, these idiosyncrasies are but local symptoms, they do not go to the core of the matter, which affects humanity as a whole. It is man's impotence when he faces the elemental pattern of his existence—the inevitable cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, and the mechanical succession of the generations in all ages and all climes—which has done more than aught else to foster Byronism in Western Europe, as it has fostered the nihilistic cult of Nirvana in the East. This, too, is the link which binds Achilles and Heinrich von Melk, Byron and the Buddha, together as blood brothers.

Chapter II

WEIMAR AND THE DÆMONIC

Goethe—Wilhelm Muller—Mazzini—Ferdinand von Freiligrath—
Annette von Droste-Hulshoff—Betty Paoli—Heine—Count Platen
—Prince Puckler-Muskau

THE term "Byronic" is used somewhat unscientifically in the title and throughout large sections of this book. It has been abundantly prefixed to the names of German authors, who betray certain qualities of thought, emotion, and style which can be labelled "Byronic," in accordance with the definitions of the previous chapter. Though Byron's art fertilized many German works of literature, our principle of selection is analogy rather than direct influence. The justification of the title is thus primarily that it means something to the English reader. But complex as the connotation of the term "Byronic" is, it cannot hope to cover all the variations of Teutonic gloom distilled in the following pages!

Even without Byron, the tone of modern German literature would have been shot through with much anxious self-questioning, and cosmic speculation, thanks principally to the legacy of the Storm and Stress movement, to the author of *Werther*, to Jean Paul, and later to Schopenhauer, and a tangled skein of foreign sources. But it was Byron who lent thews and sinews to the flabby German Prometheans, he instilled a much needed, mascu-

line element, and so, for a time, prevented a characteristic literary attitude from degenerating into mere sentimentality on the one hand, and nightmares of abstract speculation on the other. Even so, these distressing vices of the German "folk-soul" have triumphed with dismal frequency

Only a fraction of the German literature which is Byronic in spirit, is also Byronic in origin, in that narrower sense which betokens direct influence. An occasional phrase in Goethe's last testimonies, most of the plot and atmosphere of Heine's early Romantic dramas, some frantic verse by Waiblinger—these drew their inspiration straight from the English source, or from the earliest translations. But men like Grabbe and Lassalle, with views similarly jaundiced, knew Byron more cursorily. For them—and this is also true in some measure of the earlier "imitators"—Byron did not create a new world; he unlocked the world within them. As the stream of German Byronism broadens, the fertilizing current emanating from England dwindles. The Byronic Teuton finds sustenance elsewhere, battenng on the congenial matter generously supplied by French, Italian, Russian and Scandinavian authors. Occasionally, a German poet harks back to the original source. Lenau, Detlev von Liliencron, and Gerhart Hauptmann all suffered the impact of the direct Byronic tradition, without however surrendering their personal vision to the genius of the English bard. Theirs was a resonance rather than an imitation.

The first German of note to fall under Byron's spell was the very pontiff of letters, the Sage of Weimar—Goethe. For the last sixteen years of his life he was a devoted collector of Byroniana. He mourned the Englishman's death as a sad loss to European culture, and wrote him a

splendid epitaph in the second part of *Faust*. His admiration for the artist was as great as for the man. He dubbed him his only peer in contemporary literature and "the finest talent of the century," albeit his extravagant praise was sometimes tempered by repulsion, when he noted the misanthropy and spleen manifest in the views of his protégé. Byron, in turn, dedicated *Sardanapalus* and *Werner* to his German admirer. His reverence for Goethe was however based on slender knowledge. We are not concerned here with the exact range of this acquaintanceship, nor in assessing the influence of *Faust* on *Manfred*, *Cain*, and *The Deformed Transformed*, nor are we concerned with Goethe's detailed criticisms of Byron's poems and dramas. The evidence has already been twice sifted.² But the temper and implication of Goethe's admiration are here apposite, since they did affect the general course of German Byronism.

It is foolish to rate Byron's influence on Goethe highly. It is not in the nature of things, for a man of thirty to modify the opinions of a man of seventy, especially when the older man is himself an intellectual giant. But Byron did evoke memories. Goethe saw in the young Englishman a Titan very much of the Storm and Stress type, who had never had the good fortune to endure the chastening effects of office. Byron was a Goethe who had never undertaken the pilgrimage to Weimar! Hence Goethe's mingled praise and admonition. He loved Byron as a very old man might love a prodigal son. His joy at beholding his own rejuvenated likeness, was mixed with fears for Byron's safety that proved too well founded. Goethe's anguish was sharpened, because he never quite damped down the fires of adolescence in his own person. Even after the renunciation of Weimar, he continued to struggle with unruly

nostalgias, and fled the *hybris* of vaulting spiritual pride. Goethe's conception of Byron as a "dæmonic" personality, no less than his interest in the exploits of Puckler-Muskau and his patronage of Fenimore Cooper's novels, show that an elemental, incalculable Goethe, still lurked beneath the decorous uniform of the Weimar minister.

As a young man, Goethe had felt his own personality to be a dæmonic force, an undivertable natural phenomenon that must run its destined race, like the torrent in *The Song of Mahomet*. The vital awareness of these subtle energies had stilled the importunity of the intellect. It was not till he was past middle age that he endeavoured, in his *Autobiography*, to fathom rationally the powers vouchsafed him in his youth. His trial definitions were none too happy: the dæmonic force was something "manifest only in contradictions. . . It was not divine, for it seemed devoid of reason; not human, for it possessed no understanding; not of the devil, since it brought forth good, not of the angels, since it betrayed 'Schadenfreude.'" In old age, Goethe's pre-occupation with the dæmonic almost became an obsession. He embroidered his first definition with mystic corollaries. Occasionally these bordered on the superstitious. In a letter to Zelter there is mention of "dæmons up to their tricks everywhere." Some notes recorded by Eckermann reveal Goethe's growing puzzlement. He now held that the home of the dæmon was "im Unbewussten." "The phenomena of the Unconscious" of present-day jargon, is therefore our modern rationalization of processes which a hundred years ago, were still ascribed to a power half-infernal, half-divine. Secondly, Goethe no longer believed that the dæmonic was necessarily "something innate," subject to the laws of heredity, and inseparably bound to the mind of man. On the contrary, it could

now be "extraneous"—a mysterious entity that could fall out of the blue, and fasten itself, parasite-fashion, on unsuspecting mortals!

Goethe's later definitions of the dæmonic hint at a certain uneasiness he felt with regard to its rôle in the moral scheme of the universe. Precisely on this point, his judgements are most tentative, even evasive; to speak his mind fully, it seems, might have been subversive of his optimism. His references to the "dæmon of hypochondria" are significant, if one recalls Goethe's largely pathological interpretation of Byron's woes. Faust's tussle with the Dæmon of Care forms a noteworthy parallel. On the other hand, the positive influence of the dæmonic is best illustrated, Goethe asserts, by the super-human productivity and the power to stimulate others, possessed by men of genius, geniuses are indeed the prime instruments of the dæmonic. "The greater a man, the more susceptible is he to the influence of the dæmonic." It would seem that the aged Goethe, who had clipped his wings so long with the shears of Classicism, sometimes yearned to soar away into the spacious, hazardous regions he had known in his youth. Perhaps he recalled the brave words he had once flung at Lavater "All your ideals shall not prevent my being both good and bad—like Nature!"

If this be so, then Byron's career was at least partly responsible for Goethe's final estimate of the texture of genius. The pages of Eckermann show that during the last years of his life, Goethe selected the following names as representative of the dæmonic personality: Napoleon, Raphael, Frederick II, Peter the Great, Phidias, Dürer, Holbein, Mozart, Byron, Shakespeare, and Karl August of Weimar. Omitting Phidias as an insignificant minority, E. M. Butler has concluded that "the dæmon,

as Goethe conceived it, was entirely un-Greek as he conceived the Greek genius." Rather was his conception a Byronic one! It is true that this awakening of Byronic feeling was closely parallel to the sensations he had himself protagonized half a century before; the parallel is none the less meaningful. Goethe's belief in the *inevitability* of such a work as Mozart's *Don Juan* closely resembles Byron's faith in predestination, and also Lombroso's mechanistic view of genius. In one sense it was a belittlement of all human achievement; and it was seconded by the increasing stress Goethe now laid on his overwhelming debt to his environment.

The exact relationship between Byron and Goethe is difficult to elucidate, not because material is lacking, but because the existing material is riddled with contradictions. Yet, one firm tie can be established between these two minds—the philosophy of Spinoza. It is to the determinism of Spinoza that Byron's theory of predestination must ultimately be traced, via the intermediary stage of Calvinism, and Spinoza equally sanctioned those limitations of genius proclaimed by Goethe in old age.

The immediate aftermath of the auspicious reception of Byronism at Weimar, was not so fruitful as might be supposed. Goethe could not have been more generous in his criticism, he had laid an august foundation-stone to Byron's German mausoleum; there was not much applause. Goethe's benediction had been whispered in the ears of dilettantes like Zelter and Eckermann. Like them, he was out of touch with the younger generation, which, whether from malicious envy or revolutionary ardour, liked nothing better than to throw brickbats at the "reactionary" colossus of Weimar. If nevertheless, many of these younger men accepted Byron, it was not as Goethe's protégé that they welcomed him, but rather as

an ally against everything that Goethe—the “Classical” Goethe—represented. Goethe had never discussed his favourite’s Socialist tendencies, and his championship of the Luddites. Either he deliberately turned a blind eye upon these activities, or else they were vaguely included under the rubric of “hypochondria.”

But what was poison for Goethe, was meat and drink to the many who hovered on the periphery of the Young German Movement. Till about 1825, Byron was deemed in Germany to be an eccentric with an unusual gift of self-expression. His frantic pessimism was explained by reference to his unhappy private life. But as elsewhere, so also in Germany, his untimely demise in Greece aroused a fresh glow of enthusiasm for his poems. Supporters of Romanticism recalled that the hero of Holderlin’s mystical novel *Hyperion* (1797), had dealt a blow for Greek independence in the struggle against the Turk. They were charmed to discover fiction become reality. Now it was that Wilhelm Müller published the first German biography of Byron; and shortly afterwards he composed a poetic eulogy. This piece of verse, *Byron*, was the first German work wherein the English Lord was hailed as a doughty fighter against political reaction. The linking of Byron’s name with the cause of Greek emancipation, heralded a new era of Byronic criticism, hitherto dissected in a vacuum, the poet was soon welcomed by the young Germans as the prime mouthpiece of the spirit of the age. What before had been a symptom of a private maladjustment, was now thought proof of a healthily awakened political consciousness! To possess a temperament that smacked of Byronic *Zerrissenheit* (“incoherence”), was no longer a mark of hypochondria, but rather, an enviable token of Promethean fire. In this spirit Borne exclaims in his *Letters from Paris* (1832): “I would

sacrifice all the enjoyment in my life for a single year of Byron's woes."

Byron's voice was undoubtedly a potent factor in the struggle against the Metternich régime, but this is an aspect of Byronism that can hardly find a place here. A man with a social grievance may possess a Byronic temperament, but not necessarily so. Many of the young German writers who paid tribute to Byron's name, had no inkling of his spiritual travail. The nexus between Byron and Socialism is fortuitous, as far as Byronism in the larger sense is concerned, the Byronic Man can appear as a Tory no less than as a Socialist—as Lassalle, but also as Disraeli. Moreover, Liberal ranks have often ridiculed the image of an exclusively "revolutionary" Byron, and have held his iconoclasm suspect. Already in 1839, Joseph Mazzini juxtaposed the names of Byron and Goethe, because he regarded their bearers as the two supreme figureheads of a dying epoch.

"They were the poetic expression of the principle, of which England was the economic, France the political, and Germany the philosophic expression. the last formula, effort, and result of a society founded on the principle of Individuality"

Mazzini defined the difference between the two men thus. Byron was the poet of Individuality in its subjective life, Goethe the poet of Individuality in its objective life. To Mazzini, the advocate of a new social order, Individualism appeared as a dread disease. He suggested therefore that the distinction between Byron and Goethe was not one of temperament, but of pathological degree. in both men the malady of Individualism had made rapid progress, finally developing in Goethe into "the egoism of in-

difference," and in Byron into "the egoism of despair." This was a twofold condemnation of the age they represented; yet, in "the beautiful symbol" of Byron's death, Mazzini saw the promise of mankind's regeneration. He would certainly have been hard put to it, to account for the Byron-fever that swept the ranks of the Young Germans. . . .

In the early years of the Byronic Movement in Germany, interest in the poet was localized in those parts of the country that lay most open to English influence—the North Sea coast and the Rhinelands, or more especially, in Hamburg and Westphalia. In Hamburg, Heine chanced upon some early, selected translations; in Westphalia, Annette von Droste-Hulshoff (1797-1848), and Ferdinand von Freiligrath (1810-76), both became enthusiasts, reading Byron in the original. Freiligrath owed to Byron, no less than to Victor Hugo, much of that local colour with which he bedaubed his "poetry of the desert." He was, however, of mediocre intellect, and scarcely aware of the profounder implications of Byronism.

Annette von Droste-Hulshoff was endowed with greater integrity and a more subtle talent. She was so fey, so possessed, that she could dispense with borrowed spectres. As an inexperienced girl she succumbed to the Byronic glamour, but thanks to the virile spirit that dominated her feeble body, she soon pierced Byron's aura of mystery. The spell was potent, but brief. And yet it is a thing to take the imagination, that Germany's foremost poetess was poring over *Manfred* at Münster, at the self-same time as Goethe found himself enthralled at Weimar!

The Austrian poetess, Betty Paoli, was more sentimental and less gifted than Annette. There is little

originality in her poems, which alternate between peevish threats of suicide, and pastiches of Byron, Heine, Lenau and Freiligrath. One of the root causes of her melancholy has, however, a more than personal significance—her mixed blood. Betty Paoli was of Jewish, Hungarian, and Belgian descent. She craved to be assimilated with her German friends, and in the impossibility of absolute assimilation, she nursed a lifelong wound. This feeling was not unknown even to a Disraeli. But in Germany and Austria, it has been continually exacerbated by non-subjective factors. The desire for racial assimilation is of interest here, as a specialized case of that sense of "otherness," of "not belonging" in his environment, to which the Byronic Man is heir. Thomas Mann, himself of mixed blood, might term this quality *Differenziertheit*. It is not surprising therefore, that a great number of German Byronic writers have been of mixed, frequently of Jewish, descent.

From 1825 onwards, the Byronic tide rose in Germany with extraordinary swiftness and left the critics gasping. In the excitement of the hour, they often confounded friend and foe. The word "Byronic" was in everybody's mouth; used so frequently, and with so little discrimination, it sometimes became meaningless. Local Byrons were springing up mushroom-like all over Europe, but most of them proved mere toadstools. In England, Elizabeth Norton was dubbed "the woman Byron." In Germany, the proud title of "the German Byron" was conferred on the young Heine in Berlin by Elise von Hohenhausen—in this instance with some justification. We are puzzled however that so benign a poet as Chamisso who, when not lispings of rose-petals and domestic bliss, was botanizing, should also have been included amongst the Byronic galaxy, which now suddenly powdered the

literary heavens. Faced by such fatuity, the modern critic must select warily.

Two aristocrats, and a Jew, must suffice to complete the record of the earliest phase of German Byronism: Count von Platen (1796-1835), Prince von Pückler-Muskau (1785-1871), and Heinrich Heine (1797-1856). All three were thus born in the eighteenth century, though only "Prince Pickle" also saw the greater part of the nineteenth. With his exception, they are separated by less than a decade from a later Byronic trio—Lenau, Grabbe, and Waiblinger. Grillparzer too might well find a place here, but with his peculiar mastery of feminine psychology, the Austrian dramatist would tempt us too early into a discussion of the Fatal Woman.

After becoming acquainted with the translations in F. Jacobsen's *Anthology*,¹ Heine's admiration for Byron soon grew into adulation, it reached its height between 1820 and 1822. Proof is furnished by his two Romantic dramas, *Almansor* and *William Ratchiff*. Subsequently, his admiration declined, in proportion as the positive attitude to life he adopted under the influence of Saint Simon, grew upon him. For all the certainty of the main outline the details of this development are a little obscure: it is not always easy to separate the latent Byronism in Heine from Byron's influence on Heine. To the end of Heine practised the art of "hallowing in order to desecrate." But while he shared with Byron this aspect of Romantic Irony, it is unnecessary to suppose that he was here following in his predecessor's footsteps. The murder of ideals is not a literary fashion for which it is incumbent to find a "source." We are all masochists of some kind. The French critic, J. Legras, has shown that it is wrong to speak of Heine's *Weltschmerz*, except in so far as *Weltschmerz* presupposes a tragic conception of love:

"Heine tout au contraire, est un des plus confiants, des plus espérants parmi les hommes de notre siècle. Nul plus ardemment n'a cru au progrès, à l'amélioration des lois et de la société . sa tristesse, ou, si l'on veut, son pessimisme, n'est donc pas d'ordre logique, mais sentimental "

Heine's basic optimism did not however emerge in his early Byronic dramas, and cannot consequently be regarded as a bulwark against Byronic influence during those early years. The heroes of these dramas differ from the usual Byronic type, in that they are spared a haunting sense of personal guilt. Yet, the languishing swains of Byron and Heine resemble each other in this, that misfortune in love constitutes the prime fount of their woes. Both poets conceive unrequited passion as an evil darker than mortality itself.

*"Fare thee well . .
These are words of deeper sorrow
Than the wail above the dead. . . ."*

But Byron is in worse case than Heine. Heine has been robbed of his mistress, because, in a material world, her mercenary judgement has triumphed over his loving heart, he is left with the consolation that the fault does not lie in his own inability to give affection. Byron on the other hand is haunted by ennui, emotion has outstripped vitality.

*" 'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone which fades so
fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past."*

Accordingly, thwarted love is not a more important in-

gradient in Heine's *Weltschmerz* than in Byron's. Heine may have more strings to his bow, he may, thanks to his facile lyric flow, have produced a greater number of variations on the theme of love-sorrow; but Byron's tragedy is more poignant, because he was so largely his own enemy.

The chief subsidiary element in Byron's *Weltschmerz* is a certain cosmic nympholepsy, to which may be added his political unrest. Despite his outcry against the enslavement of Europe after Napoleon's downfall, Byron's political criticism has an appearance of insubstantiality, owing to his habitual resort to the effete imagery of feudalism. With Heine, the position is reversed, there is but a thin veneer of metaphysical idealism in his *Weltschmerz*, and all the more insistent prodding of the sores in the body political. The impression that Heine is realistically recording the occurrences of the day, is heightened by the fact that into the general pattern of politics, he weaves a medley of personal worries, which Byron was either fortunate enough to escape, or which he shunned in his poetry, reserving them for the more intimate tone of his letters. Heine, however, sought relief by informing the reader of his headaches, his debts, and the unæsthetic grind of his juridical studies. Above all, the racial handicap of the aspiring Jew revealed itself in the bewildering alternation of a sense of superiority with a sense of inferiority. This mental rhythm is reflected in Heine's jerky, glittering style. Just as the prime impulse which fashioned Byron's virile heroes is perhaps to be found in their creator's lameness, so too, Heine may have been fired to produce an Almansor, not because in real life he was Almansor's peer, but because, on the contrary, he was a sick, needy Jew, heavy-laden with a sense of

oppression, to whom his hero was a dream-compensation for the squalor of reality

Heine drew most inspiration for *Almansor* from *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*. He shared Byron's faults as well as his excellences. The most noteworthy fault, was his incapacity to draw a convincing heroine. It was almost as if the Titanism of the male characters produced a compensating enervation in Zuleima, the beautiful but insipid Hour.

The relationship of *Almansor* to the Fate Tragedy, generally associated in German literature with the names of Adolf Müllner, Zacharias Werner, and Grillparzer, has an interesting bearing on the problem of the Byronic Man, inasmuch as its central property is none other than the Dæmonic, viewed through the Gothic spectacles of later Romanticism. Clumsily manipulated, the Fate Tragedy even presents a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Dæmonic, and thus reveals one aspect of Byronism in decay. Though the atmosphere in *William Ratcliff* is more completely suffused with the nightmare elements of the grotesque, and the uncanny, yet, as far as motivation is concerned, *Almansor* too is already imbued with that fatalistic conception of heredity, which constitutes the very essence of the Fate Tragedy. Thus, in his opening soliloquy, declaimed in the ruins of an old Moorish castle, *Almansor* tells how he feels the sympathetic presence of his mother's spirit. Ghostly visitants accelerate the tragic climax, which is significantly witnessed by *Almansor's* father Aly, a Moslem turned Christian. In his last, elegiac lines, Aly gives an oddly sadistic twist to the new faith he has embraced, provided one substitutes the symbol of the gladiator for Heine's symbol of the juggernaut, there emerges a thoroughly Byronic vision, of a victimized humanity.

*"Der Allmacht Willen kann ich nicht begreifen,
Doch Ahnung sagt mir, ausgereutet wird
Die Lilje und die Myrte auf dem Weg
Woruber Gottes goldner Siegeswagen
Hinrollen soll in stolzer Majestat."*

It is illuminating that Heine should have changed the religious faith of his hero. The Christian slave mentioned in another source—Hita's Spanish chronicle—has become a young and noble Moor. This Moor, who feels himself an outcast in Christian society, is the mildly disguised figure that symbolizes the oppressed Jew.

In *William Ratcliff*, the love-plot is completely under the sway of the Fate Tragedy. The mutual love of Ratcliff and Maria is marred by Maria's caprice, which bids her marry a man for whom she feels no particular affection. In the previous generation, the similar fickleness of Maria's mother had brought doom upon Ratcliff's father; he, the forsaken but still importunate lover had been slain by the jealous husband. The spirits of this earlier unhappy couple, now hover round son and daughter, and when these meet death in their turn, the ghosts of the earlier generation unite, as a token that Fate has at length been appeased.

The grafting of elements in the Fate Tragedy to a Byronic theme can only serve to emasculate the Byronic Hero. In his initial stature, the Byronic Man only partly surrenders his individuality to destructive, dæmonic forces; though he may succumb in the end, he realizes the dangers of his position, and strives valiantly against them, he is a man with inner tensions, and as such prompts sympathy. Ratcliff however is the spineless instrument of external forces.

*"Es gibt entsetzlich seltsame Gewalten,
Die mich beherrschen dunkle Mächte gibt's,
Die meinen Willen lenken, die mich treiben
Zu jeder Tat, die meinen Arm regieren,
Und die schon in der Kindheit mich umschauert."*

Ratcliff, a sleep-walker who never wakes, has a purely pathological interest, one feels that in him, the Byronic Man is losing his already tenuous grasp of reality.

By overhauling our earlier definition, we may see what changes have come upon the Byronic Hero, as interpreted by Heine. Of those elements proper to him, which have hitherto been placed under the ægis of Brummell, de Sade, and Lucifer, one group falls almost entirely away, while the remaining two require amended definitions. The dandy has now assumed exiguous proportions, and the Byronic Man thereby loses much of his polish and grandeur. Not that certain forms of dandyism were alien to Heine! At times, his regal phantasy out-tops Byron's. There is the majestic passage in *The Town of Lucca* which runs "The red glow of evening seemed to enfold the mountains with purple mantles, and the last rays of the sun illumined their summits, so that it appeared as if they were kings bearing golden diadems upon their brow. But I stood like a world-emperor in the midst of these crowned vassals, who silently paid me homage." The imagery is impressive, yet it also shows clearly how the pose of the dandy may be instinct with megalomania. In his early dramas however, Heine did not surround his heroes with much of this pageantry.

The motives of guilt and repentance have also well-nigh vanished. Lucifer finds himself ousted by his old archetype, Prometheus. In *William Ratcliff*, the hero crassly divides the populace into "the well-fed" and

"hungry devils"; thus early, was the attention of the Byronic Teuton in part focused upon the proletariat, but it was not till Lassalle that the lot of the underdog was to become his absorbing preoccupation. This increasing interest in social problems went hand in hand with the decline of the dandy. Elsewhere in Europe, the aristocratic ideal of the Byronic Hero was still upheld in the second half of the century in the sexually inverted form of the Fatal Woman. But the incongruity of the grand style in middle class Germany, was almost as fatal to her as it had been to her male predecessor.

The sadistic element in Heine likewise differs markedly from Byron's. With Byron, pure sadism is often unconsciously disguised, with Heine, sadism is wilfully bedizened with decadent allurements; the senses are deliberately titillated by the dream-like atmosphere. The scenes of bloodshed in *William Ratcliff*, whether actually shown on the stage, or merely recounted, are made more acceptable by their presentment as a divinely sanctioned ritual. This method anticipates the later union of Catholicism and sadism in decadent literature, as exemplified by the work of Huysmans and Villiers de l'Isle Adam, for, the emotional anæmia which often underlay the erratic frenzy of Byronic characters finally attained such proportions, that sin itself had to be seasoned with a mystagogic garnish, before it appeared appetizing! Heine thus occupies a nodal position in the history of the Byronic Man. He prophesies many future developments, but he also shows how, in one sense, the Byronic Hero passed away with his creator, for already during Byron's lifetime, this creature of his imagination was undergoing modification at the hands of Heine and others.

It is perhaps strange that Count Platen, whom Heine attacked so mercilessly for his homosexuality, and for

what he regarded as the effete and pretentious classicism of an intellectual snob (Platen cordially reciprocated Heine's loathing), should also be brought to book as a member of the Byronic clan. But it is not unusual for the Byronic Man to be so self-preoccupied, that he fails to recognize his spiritual brother. . .

Platen resembles Byron both in his career and in his attitude to life. He was the scion of a nobility as ancient as that of the Norman family of Biron, a Platen had already taken part in the campaigns conducted by Henry I against the Wends in 926. But just as Byron's innate aristocracy of thought and feeling was offset in his boyhood by the vulgarity of his mother, so too, with Platen, the fact of his noble lineage was deliberately withheld from him by his parents, during his childhood years in Ansbach. In both cases, early restraint precipitated later over-development. Both abandoned themselves to the hazardous delights of introspection. While Byron tried to immolate his egoism on the altar of Greek independence, Platen sought release from his own importunate individualism, by championing the cause of the Poles. Both men venerated Napoleon, though whereas Byron's enthusiasm changed to execration after Waterloo, Platen was initially antagonistic, it was Metternich, and the ignominy of St. Helena, that made him change his front.

Platen was more given to masochism than sadism. His taste in ruins reeked of necrophily. As a boy, Platen delighted to converse with the grave-digger at Ansbach. Later, he was fascinated by the cemetery at Zurich; cemeteries formed an important item in his Italian travels. A significant offshoot of his masochism was his conviction that beauty and death are functions of each other, which is the philosophy expounded in the fragmentary *Tristan*:

*“Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen
Ist dem Tode schon anheimgegeben .*

*Ach, er mochte wie ein Quell versiechen,
Jedem Hauch der Luft ein Gift entsaugen
Und den Tod aus jeder Blume riechen.”*

Platen had a trick of self-vilification which was intensified by his homosexuality. To a lesser degree, Byron and Pückler-Muskau both suffered from this same sexual abnormality, the bi-sexuality of genius is generally admitted. Amongst persons of Byronic temperament, perversion is as potent a factor as alien blood in strengthening the lamentable awareness of “otherness.” With Platen, the firm belief that his malady was incurable, formed the basis of an obdurate sense of inferiority, and consequently for his reproaches against the malign, cosmic forces which had wrenched his emotional life from normal channels. He strove however, to sublimate his peculiarity.

“I feel that this inclination is something noble, that its development in me is taking a noble course. I desire to make myself as worthy as possible of the object of my affection, and perhaps too, to better *his* foibles and weaknesses.”

Years later, when Knobel told Platen that he found his attentions tiresome, Platen in his despair wrote in his diary: “It is not Knobel’s loss that concerns me so much, as the terrible conviction that Nature has destined me to be an eternal unfortunate.” Platen was, in addition, prey to a doubt that besets every author—the doubt of his own intellectual capacity.

Far from despairing, Platen determined to revenge himself on the fate that had set him so low, and acquired

a bulk of miscellaneous knowledge, gleaned in various tongues. At Würzburg he over-studied under Dollinger. There were moments when the accumulation of knowledge brought fresh doubts in its train "Reading, nothing but endless reading! It almost seems as if I only live to read, or even—that I am not alive at all, but merely read!" It was then that he was confronted with ennui. Platen's studiousness at first sight differentiates him from the usual Byronic type, whose diffused activities lack the single-mindedness of the scholar. But Platen's steadfast application was also wanting in conviction. It was but one more disguise for the lack of vitality that is so often the cause of Byronic melancholy. Platen's zeal for erudition, like Lenau's, was not due to the insatiable cosmic curiosity of a true Faust, but was simply a drug—the artificial matrix of an otherwise empty life. This is a field of Byronism that Aldous Huxley has recently illuminated by trenchant analysis.

In view of the many similarities between Byron and Platen, it is odd that the graph marking the presumptive disciple's admiration for the English poet should steer so erratic a course. In April 1817, Platen found Byron's poetry "insupportable." But the third and fourth Cantos of *Childe Harold* impressed him where all else had failed. The tie now cemented was destined to endure. But he displayed more sympathy for the man than for the poet. He was prepared to defend Byron's morals against his traducers, but as an artist who, before all else, was a meticulous metrist, he found much of Byron's work beneath criticism.

The points of contact between Byron and Platen were perhaps outweighed by even greater temperamental divergences. Most important of these was the tragedy of Platen's inability to write tragedy. Certainly, the Aristo-

phanic vein displayed in his Romantic comedies acted as an invaluable mental astringent upon him. Yet might not the writing of tragedy have restored him homeopathically to a more marked degree? Platen was galled by his impotence in the sphere of tragedy "I am now brooding," he once wrote, "on a fresh comedy, which will, I hope, prove an advance towards tragedy." Owing to this deficiency, Platen was virtually excluded from the major portion of Byronic literary territory.

Only the *Diaries* show us to what extent Platen's self-imposed discipline was Byronically tinged. He possessed a far firmer will, than any other of those contemporary *Zerrissene* who maundered their way helplessly through their over-voluminous complete works. Self-control did not suffice for his salvation; he found succour in the Catholic Church. Any candid reader of the *Diaries* will admit that he fought a worthy battle.

The puissant personality of Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau, seems hardly akin to that of melancholiacs like Heine and Platen. The octogenarian had ample opportunity to escape the trials of prolonged adolescence. His vitality enabled him to extrovert his Byronic tics. Indeed, so radiant was his energy, so versatile its expression, that it is tempting to do what E. M. Butler has done in her biography—resolve the man into a series. There is the warrior who chased Arabs in Algeria, the dandy who imitated Brummell, the lover—of an intimidating promiscuity, the writer who dashed off a score of volumes, partly in the intervals of exuberant travel, the archaeologist who investigated the Middle Nile, the "parcomaniac," creator of groves in the sandy wastes of Silesia. This does not exhaust the Prince's many masks. There is the retired general and the would-be diplomat, the fortune-hunter and the erring—but kindly

husband, the superstitious seer, the daring horseman, the crack shot. Can this god-like creature of the gallant mustachios, have owed allegiance to the same dark, Byronic forces that plagued incompetent livers like Grabbe or Waiblinger? It does not seem probable.

Many times in the course of his life, Puckler was the prey of despondency, but rarely of intellectual woes. Generally, there was an immediate personal cause for his sorrow, and he recovered with the emotional resilience of the normal man. So he survived the disasters of his preposterous love-affairs, the tribulations of debt, the tragic-comedy of his divorce, the loss of his adored Abyssinian slave-girl, Macbuba, and the sale of his estate at Muskau. But the great-hearted Prince was not only Byronic in the externals of existence, in his picturesque travels, his *richerché* neckwear and lorgnette, his amiable seductions, the furious pace of his career. Despite his thirst for archæology, his *Wanderlust* sometimes concealed a nostalgia that was entirely ungeographical. This longing sprang from the conviction innate in the Byronic character, that happiness keeps pace with the receding horizon. This, Puckler combined, irrationally, with the faith that even so the ultimate horizon is attainable! It was in this spirit that in old age he would plan a repetition of his youthful forays.

The Byronic traveller beholds more than ordinary mortals. His absorption of a landscape is not merely photographic, but psychic. His soul registers "the faint, unhappy, far-off things," and redes the riddle of the Sphinx. In this, the awed Puckler in Egypt resembled those later Byronic rovers, Disraeli and Lassalle. With Lassalle in particular, he shared an enthusiasm for the Dervish dance, which he regarded as a cosmic revelation. There was even some slight personal link between the

two men, since Puckler befriended the lone Countess Hatzfeldt, while Lassalle was her untiring advocate.

The Prince was a staunch admirer both of Heine and Byron. The former he once addressed as "my hero and martyr", the latter he hailed, in his *Letters of a Dead Man*, as the greatest English writer since Shakespeare, taking the opportunity at the same time of condemning English snobbishness and hypocrisy. These two traits of national character had caused him some unpleasantness, during his vain attempts to capture an English heiress in 1826. He complained further, that Englishwomen would attack Byron in public, while reading him with glowing cheeks in private. Noting that the Byronic gesture would often soften a maiden's heart, though she might not care to divulge the fact, Pückler added this new blandishment to his rake's stock-in-trade.

Variations of this theme account for a good number of pages in Puckler's two most Byronic works, the eight volumes of *Semilasso*, the memoirs of a "half-exhausted" man—who is of course none other than the Prince mildly disguised—and the three volumes of his *South-eastern Picture Gallery*. There are several tales here suggestive of the remorse felt by the lover for the ruin he has brought upon his mistress. This Byronic *cliché* was to be echoed *ad nauseam* during the next decades in a Babel of tongues.

Professor Butler has tried to identify some of these stories with incidents in Puckler's career. It is hard going, she tells us, because Pückler was subject to that paradoxical code, which permitted a man to treat a woman much as he chose, provided only he shielded her "reputation." The Prince covered up his tracks with a tantalizing thoroughness—one more proof, that he was only superficially tainted with Byronism. The true Byronic Man has no such regard for the smooth functioning of the

social machine his imperious ego is heard chanting defiantly above the litanies of convention. His disguises are thin

Puckler was more of a man of affairs than most of his Byronic brethren. He was more healthily conscious of objective things—witness the careful topographical detail of his travel-descriptions. His labours as a landscape-gardener show this same agreeable contact with natural things. He lived to laugh at the grosser perversions of Byronism, and stifled erotic longing in indulgence. But to the end he remained naively superstitious, and poured strange libation to the deities of predestination. For, emancipate himself as he will, the Byronic Man rarely escapes a few hole-and-corner vestiges of his idolatry

Chapter III

BYRONIC DISINTEGRATION

Lenau and the Decadence of the Dæmonic—Grabbe and the Impact of Realism—Waiblinger Necrophily and Burlesque

GRABBE, Lenau, and Waiblinger, in addition to Platen, are among the more important German authors who mark stages in the ebbing first wave of Byronism in Germany in the nineteenth century. These four writers were born within eight years of one another—Heine's birth falling within the same span—and within a maximum of only sixteen years after Byron's birth. A more remarkable parallel is formed by their early deaths. The average age attained by them was only thirty-seven—or almost exactly Byron's own. Waiblinger was barely twenty-six when he died, Grabbe thirty-five, Platen thirty-nine, and Lenau forty-eight; Heine clung tenaciously to life till his fifty-eighth year. Thanks to this time-factor, and to the greater capacity for mental sloughing possessed by all men of real genius, Heine was able to emancipate himself from his early Byronism. In this task our four other authors failed, though Platen, thanks to Catholicism, and Waiblinger, thanks to self-irony, spasmodically approached freedom. This unfortunate quartette was also much more burdened with congenital failings than Heine. Grabbe drank himself to death, Lenau went mad; Waiblinger died of

consumption, Platen was a pervert. The theory of compensation for some inferiority or abnormality, as explanation of the Byronic attitude, is here provided with ample material for its premise¹

Lenau, the Austrian of Hungarian descent, the erratic student who oscillated from faculty to faculty, the traveller who returned disillusioned from the New World, won his considerable reputation in literature primarily as a writer of short lyric pieces. But his poetic dramas, *Don Juan* and *Faust*, contain a fuller record of the Titanic strivings which ultimately sent him to the mad-house. These two works are to be brought to assize in respect of any Byronic qualities they may hold, for even a cursory glance at them or at the *Letters*, with their curious traces of arrested development, and their absurd scrupulousness, suffice to make Lenau suspect. And as Oskar Walzel has shown, the Austrian poet essayed to give his women acquaintances "an interesting picture of his Byronically distraught imagination."

Byron was not the unique fertilizer of Lenau's thought. When *Savonarola* was written (1837), its author had been duly magnetized by Baader, Lenau's friend Martensen had acted as transmitter of the Catholic mystic's intellectual current. *The Albigensians* (1838-42), was just as clearly conceived under the Hegelian star, it marked Lenau's return to a belief in emancipation from the yoke of religious orthodoxy. Hegel's certainty of the progress to be achieved by the human mind, lent conviction to Lenau's Faustian thirst for knowledge. Amid these rival influences, Byron never loomed as large on Lenau's intellectual horizon, as he did for Heine. In the absence of convincing utterance on this score by Lenau himself, it is best to limit the possibility of direct Byronic influence, to the few special instances cited by his eminent

biographer, Eduard Castle. But in the larger sense, Lenau's works are steeped in Byronism. It is tempting, too, to see a direct emanation from England in tricks of style, such as Lenau's grotesque metaphors, in *Faust* he refers to the Trinity as a heady liqueur which man has brewed himself from the universe! There are further resemblances in Lenau's predilection for the gruesome, and in that graveyard-levity which, whilst retaining the note of banter and the *hauteur* of the dandy, is yet undeniably part of the Byronic urge towards universal desecration.

*“Wenn ich an Lust mich heiss und mud genossen,
Und mich zu schweul das Leben halt umschlossen,
Dann mach’ ich gerne Kirchhofpromenade,
Das wirkt wie eine Seelenlimonade . . .”*

The mercurial nature of the various elements that go to make the Byronic Man, has now become sufficiently obvious, even when harboured by a single personality, the component traits do not always harmonize, rather do they form a mad whirligig of attraction and repulsion. It must be accepted as one aspect of the Byronic Hero's decay, when the repulsion outweighs the attraction, that is when the individual triply welded from Lucifer, the dandy, and the sadist, as well as sloughing or altering one of these components—as in the case of Heine—feels the need of a more dramatic metamorphosis: the strain of the duplex personality becomes too intense for the single shell, which now suffers complete division, the Byronic character is simplified by being conferred, component by component, on two or more individuals, instead of on one, the various elements, monstrously swollen, require separate objectivation. This process is best studied

in the work of Grabbe, for Waiblinger, though freely manipulating the traditional elements, retains the primordial synthetic structure. Lenau's approach resembles Grabbe's. In his *Faust*, he assigns the qualities of Lucifer—with a good dash of Prometheus added—to the hero, while Mephisto reigns untrammelled over the dark kingdom of de Sade. As with Heine, the element of the dandy, in its specific form at least, has vanished, but is retained in a sublimated form. Faust is more fascinated by "the illimitable treasures of the soul," than by any outward show. It is thanks to these inward treasures alone, that he compares himself with Sardanapalus.

In Lenau's *Faust*, the theme of the penitent Lucifer continually recurs. Glimpsing a torchlight procession of children on Midsummer Eve, Faust is moved to tears by this spectacle of youth and innocence. There are moments when the whole of Nature seems attuned to this regret, the brook, murmuring in the valley-bottom, seems to be his own past innocence, weeping because of its banishment.

The penitent note is almost absent in *Don Juan*, so, too, is Faust-Lenau's thirst for final knowledge. This craving cannot be compared with that of Goethe's Faust. Lenau's Faust is less Promethean than Goethe's, the attainment of knowledge is, with him, a matter of narrow, personal ambition, divorced from the welfare of humanity. The frustration of this longing is the chief cause of his *Weltschmerz*—"My sorrow lies in my luckless, eternally ungratified passion for truth." With the advance of the drama, there is a change from minor to major key, metaphysical nostalgia is now re-voiced as that desire for absolute earthly experience, which also dominates Werther and Goethe's Faust. In Lenau,

however, this idea is mingled—at first sight oddly—with a suicidal wish:

“Solang ein Kuss auf Erden glüht,
Der nicht durch meine Seele spruht,
Solang ein Schmerz auf Erden klagt,
Der nicht an meinem Herzen nagt,
Solang ich nicht allwaltend bin,
War ich viel lieber ganz dahin.—
Ha! Wie das Meer tobt himmelwärts
Und widerhallt in dir, o Herz!
Ich fühl's, es ist derselbe Drang,
Der hier in meinem Herzen lebt,
Und der die Flut zum Himmel hebt
Die Sehnsucht nach dem Untergange”

This is the supreme compensation Faust spasmodically seeks, for his more normal condition of absorbed introspection

In *Don Juan*, the quest for absolute, earthly experience is embarked upon with equal vigour, and the hero does not waste time like Faust, by previously divagating into metaphysics. But at the end of the play, Don Juan accomplishes a curious *volte-face*. In a duel, he finds his enemy, Don Pedro, at his mercy. Instead, however, of dealing the *coup de grâce*, Juan suddenly exclaims that the situation is boring, “like everything in life.” He thereupon throws away his dagger, and Pedro, not so amiably disinterested, kills him. How can Juan's last deed be made to tally with his previous exuberance? It would seem that the vitality which Lenau infuses at odd moments into his heroes, is strangely insubstantial. Like so many of his type, Juan finds himself trapped in the vicious circle trodden out by ennui and energy; the latter is but an involuntary reflex of the former.

In times of crisis his lack of innate force becomes painfully evident. Lenau's *Faust* leaves the earth, not because the earth is too narrow for him, but because he cannot carve out any one niche for himself. Though desirous that his experience shall approach totality, he is unfit to encounter even the fragments vouchsafed him.

In *Faust*, sadism is dislocated from the hero, and takes up separate residence in Mephistopheles. This is particularly true of active sadism, with the passive, masochistic element, Faust is still ripely endowed. Mephisto is a true disciple of de Sade, his every act smacks of an ideal of destruction. Destruction is *his* province, as creation is the province of God, and Mephisto feels himself no less an artist in his own sphere than the Creator in His. Hence, the gloating phrases in which he thinks of his intention to drive Faust to murder and suicide, for he conceives himself to be a worthy *Gegenschopfer*, or anti-creator.

Lenau was not attracted by the meaner aspects of sadism. There is little in his work to bear out the self-portrait drawn in a letter to Sophie Schwab in November 1831. Having first described the joy he took as a child in conflagrations, Lenau added

"I still take this delight in misfortune. Perhaps it accounts for the diabolical twist in my expression. Probably an incendiary maniac, who also happened to be a painter, could capture it best. Truly, I deem myself a fatal exception to human nature, and that may be the reason why I think of my dissolution with a sort of voluptuous horror."

For a temperament as sensual as Lenau's, the sublimation of such impulses did not come readily. Perhaps his espousal, together with Platen, of the Polish cause, was

one such sublimation, comparable with the refined sadism Mario Praz detects in the patriotism of D'Annunzio and Swinburne.

Lenau differs from Byron in his outlook on the tender passions, his is a more optimistic view of love. For him, love is inextricably bound up with the search for God. In his letters to Sophie Lowenthal, he writes repeatedly in this vein. He declares that Sophie's love is a portion of the Divine Love, and, in like manner, conceives the heroines of his dramas as mediators of the principle of goodness. Such is Marie, the princess whose portrait Faust paints, and who seems to him an apostle of salvation, come to save him from Mephistopheles. Even Don Juan finds he has a conscience, when confronted with a similar fair apparition. Apart from the incident of Hannchen in *Faust*, Lenau's heroes, unlike Byron's, do not first destroy the angelic heroine, and then weep for the bliss that might have been, for Lenau was only potentially sadistic. Yet, Lenau-Faust gains no more stable satisfaction from love than Byron and his crew of licentious dandies! Masochism paralyses his erotic initiative. There comes a time when he can only be complacent in unhappiness. "My grief," he avers to Sophie, "is my dearest possession, because you are its origin"—but, he might safely have omitted the subordinate clause!

There is a point in the growth of intensity, whether of physical or mental states, where, if the intensity be yet further increased, the increment is not marked as an additional unit on a scale, but rather as a change of essence. This is true of the over-cultivation of the ego, which does not render a man more instinct with personality, but instead, utterly inane. Lenau was aware of this danger when he wrote

*"Mein Ich, das hohle, finstre, karge,
Umschauert mich, gleich einem Sarge."*

At this stage, the ego sometimes even becomes unconscious of itself as a unique phenomenon in space-time. It loses externality, and merges into the blurred abstractions of Humanity and Nature. When he communes with Nature, Lenau does not seek invigoration, but rather, *Betaubung*, an opiate, he celebrates a mystic union, the sensitive ear may detect the ritual note that had already been sounded in the Fate Tragedy, and which marks the decadence of the Dæmonic.

"I must return to the old sorcerers, that they may give ease to my soul—I mean, to the spirits of Nature. I am sinking back into the Dæmonic That misty vale in the forest to-day, made me as pleasantly drowsy as a magic cauldron wherein the herbs of invisibility are seething "

Yet, the Idealist philosopher may view Lenau's loss of externality more complacently than the alienist, especially if he recalls F. H. Bradley's definition of Spirit, as "the unity of the manifold, in which the externality of the manifold has utterly ceased "

Lenau's Faust has, in a high degree, a dæmonic personality. Mephisto counsels Faust to abandon himself entirely to the dictates of these inner forces. Unlike Goethe, therefore, Lenau would appear to believe that the dæmonic forces are leagued entirely with the powers of darkness. Goethe, it will be recalled, insisted to Eckermann that even his Mephisto was no dæmonic character. Lenau's negative attitude towards the dæmonic is a further step in the decay of Byronism.

Nor is this all. Lenau is obsessed by a belief in the unreality of perception. It is not fortuitous that he

seeks "the herbs of invisibility." He may be in better case than Byron as regards active sadism, but, for the rest, he is far more hopelessly unanchored. Like Byron, he voices his dismay at the transience of all terrestrial things, but he ventures further, for he harbours doubts as to the *present* reality of thought and sensation. As in the insubstantial universe of Arthur Schnitzler, life merges into a dream, and dreams become the stuff of life. This is a dangerous constataion for a man with a Byronic temperament. It is in the same spirit that Don Juan utters his nihilist philosophy of marriage—"Whomsoever a woman embraces, is not the man she holds him for!" The ironical circumlocution he employs for murder—"converting your vocal nullity into a mute nullity"—is based on the same morbid conception. And the same belief accounts for the odd unfinality of Faust's suicide—"I am a dream of joy, and guilt, and pain, and this knife dreams its way into my heart." In passages such as these, the slumbrous atmosphere is not, as in Heine's dramas, a mere anæsthetic, intended to veil the grosser aspects of the ritual blood-orgy, but rather, a token of Lenau's profound conviction that life, like death, is a trance, and the gateway from one to the other no more than a nightmare.

Christian Dietrich Grabbe furnishes a cruder example than Lenau of decadent Byronism. With no other author may one so pertinently assume, that the carefully cultivated aristocratic pose marks rebellion against a sordid environment. As the son of a warder, as a native of the stubbornly provincial little town of Detmold, as a minor legal official beset with forensic drudgery, and as partner in an unhappy marriage, Grabbe had good cause to seek a higher plane of existence in literature. Unfortunately, he also sought a surrogate in the ale-house.

Though himself hopelessly uncouth, he left his contemporaries in no doubt as to his contempt for the mob—*das Gesindel*

Grabbe was an ardent Byron-fan. In his essay *On Shakespearomania*, he repeated the critical dictum of the age, that Byron was Shakespeare's only worthy peer. But his admiration was not equalled by his understanding. Grabbe was far less a creative thinker than Byron. He essayed to make his heroes intense, rather than subtle, but he only produced unamiable golliwogs, as *gauche* and ponderous as crude woodcuts. Too simple and emphatic in his treatment of the Byronic character, Grabbe robbed it of much of its enigma. Byron's heroes may indeed destroy their womenfolk, but only by fatal mischance or after the intricate machinery of their minds has become deranged. Grabbe's heroes murder brutally and mechanically, they are animal misogynists. Sadism is well to the fore in his work, and often trespasses to the very borders of the articulate. Not unjustly did the Detmold lawyer dub himself "*Der Schmutterer*." Thus, at the end of *The Duke of Gothland*, we find the Duke chasing murderously after his negro foe Berdoa, whilst uttering the grotesquely primitive cry

"*Ho hussa! Negerjagd! Schwarzwildbretjagd,
Schwarzwildbret-Neger-Neger-Jagd!*"

Grabbe did not know the lure of the metaphysical. He was impervious to religious argument. Consequently, his conception of death was that of the materialist. Unlike the heroes of Byron and Home, Grabbe's stalwarts are not prone to magniloquent, dying gestures, they whimper for bandages. This treatment was later accorded much praise by the Naturalist School, whose

dramatic methods Grabbe frequently anticipated. It is of interest, as yet another blow aimed at the dignity of the Byronic Hero.

Grabbe's blurring of moral values, sometimes approaches a true, Nietzschean inversion. In his *Gothland*, Grabbe demonstrates with fierce cynicism, how good may form the foundation for evil. A more amusing example of the delight he took in juggling with the two poles of the moral scale is furnished by the play *Farce, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Profundities*, wherein the devil deems fit to take earthly shape as a vicar! Grabbe's devil, like Lenau's, is more the elvish figure of the chap-books, than the elegant man-of-the-world of the Byron-Musset-Hoffmann-Hauff tradition.

The dramas in which Grabbe sketched his ideal of super-humanity, were the pseudo-historical plays *Duke Theodor of Gothland*, *Marius and Sulla*, *The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa*, *The Emperor Henry VI*, *Napoleon or the Hundred Days*, *Kosciuszko*, *Hannibal*, *Hermann's Battle*, and lastly, the attempt at a philosophical piece, *Don Juan and Faust*. *Gothland* was the first and most frenzied of his dramas. The Duke, whom Grabbe idealized, is a creature of impulse, he follows unquestioningly all the dictates of his heart, as though he were a descendant of the capricious geniuses of Storm and Stress. This proves his undoing. On the death of his brother Manfred, Theodor finds it unaccountably heartless on the part of a third brother, who is Chancellor of Sweden, that the latter should immediately resume his public duties. Actually, the patriotic Chancellor suppresses his private sorrow, only because Sweden is engaged in internecine strife with the Finns. The leader of the enemy, the negro Berdoa, poisons Theodor's mind, so that he suspects the Chancellor of fratricide; finding no

redress at the Swedish court, Theodor slays the Chancellor with his own hand! Maliciously, Grabbe demonstrates how brother-love itself may lead to the groundless murder of a brother! When the Duke learns that the Chancellor was, after all, innocent, he seeks refuge from his conscience in a thoroughly sadistic philosophy, tempered by belief in an all-pervading Fate, which Grabbe probably borrowed from Mullner. This unexpected change in Theodor's life-rhythm corresponds precisely to the accepted Byronic pattern, prior to Manfred's death, Theodor had been a pious Christian!

Grabbe's conviction that pronounced evil may arise from good, is a deliberate inversion of Goethe's creed. A remark in a letter to Kettembell is here significant—"Only Satan can have been truly good, otherwise he would not now be so monstrously evil." The logic of the sentence is perhaps obscure, but it shows effectively to what extent Grabbe was engrossed with the type of the Fallen Angel.

Grabbe's second play, *Marius and Sulla*, which remained a fragment, like *Kosciuszko*, shows a change in its author's ideal of a superman, for here, Grabbe had two characters of equal importance to manipulate, and while the one, Marius, for all his senility, resembles Gothland, the second, Sulla, is his foil, yet, Grabbe showed a marked preference for Sulla. Marius is thus the more typically Byronic of the rivals. He is the Man of Feeling, to Sulla's Man of Reason. The bond between Marius and his men is an emotional one. His desire for vengeance on Sulla has the fervour of a religious mission. Sulla's more disciplined troops follow their commander, because it is expedient; they believe he can fashion a sound political programme. Sulla has an intellectual adroitness, which is the sole measure of his superiority

over Marius. Chill and aloof, he regards his men as mere pawns in the game. Yet, he too, on occasions, is capable of emotional orgasms

*“Der Pobel irrt sich, wenn er glaubt,
Ich hatte keine Leidenschaften, weil
Ich sie gebandigt! O, sie sind nur um
So fürchterlicher, je mehr sie mir gehorchen!
Ich machte sie zu zahmen Haushunden,
Sie lecken bang und schmeichelnd meine Kleider,
Doch wehe dem, auf welchen ich sie hetze!”*

Sulla is a Gothland whose stronger will enables him to harness his sadistic impulses. His synthesis of emotion and intellect, if unattractive, is at least less unbalanced than is the psyche of the average Byronic individual. Had Grabbe developed this theme further, he might not have been included here, as yet another warning example of decadent Byronism. As it was, in his next drama, *Don Juan and Faust*, he reverted to his earlier model, Gothland, the eccentric who abandons himself unreservedly to his “*Triebleben*”

Don Juan and Faust, Grabbe's sole attempt at a drama of ideas, must receive praise for the daring and original juxtaposition of its two chief characters, even though the treatment is sometimes fantastic, and the thought unequal. In this play, Grabbe found himself in two minds, there is tension between his innate nihilism, and his wish—by awarding the palm to the gay liver, Don Juan, at the expense of the intellectual, Faust—to portray a character that should glorify the positive doctrines of Saint Simon. Grabbe's morbidly negative bias is revealed chiefly in the complete eclipse of moral values. Faust accepts without demur the argument of Don Juan, that the sole way he (Faust), could have found

happiness on earth, would have been to bring shame and ruin on Donna Anna. And the final scene, wherein Don Juan and Faust are *both* hauled off to Hades by a triumphant Mephisto, is a cynical comment on the ultimate value of their various striving. For the rest, Juan reveals that most persuasive symptom of Byronism, the inability to view life progressively. "Each goal attained is death. Hail! Hail to him who could hunger eternally!" This ideal is not a parallel of Goethe's doctrine, that the process of striving brings greater satisfaction than actual accomplishment, rather is it a deliberate evasion of attainment, an apotheosis of barren nostalgia. Thus, the struggle in Grabbe's mind between nihilism and Saint Simonism, could only bring victory to the negative creed. Heine had proved more amenable to treatment, but the new French materialism was unable to dispel Grabbe's hypochondria.

A link is forged between Byron, Grabbe, and Heine, by the dæmonic individualism of *The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa*. As in Heine's dramas, the atmosphere is largely that of the Fate Tragedy. *Barbarossa*, by recourse to a theory of transcendental influences governing human actions, waives all issues of personal responsibility. He wages war not so much against Henry the Lion, as against Henry's star.

Of the motley crew sketched by Grabbe in *Napoleon, or the Hundred Days*, the figure that most invites discussion is not so much the oddly static Napoleon, with his belief that his will is the instrument of natural law, but rather the eminently Byronic executioner, Jouve. Jouve is a sadist and dandy combined, a type caricatured by Grabbe himself as Freiherr Mordax in *Farce, Satire, Irony and Deeper Profundities*. Mordax never undertakes mass-murder, without first protecting his linen with a table-

napkin! Jouve too, combines the manners of the cavalier with the instincts of the tiger. Barbey d'Aurevilly would have applauded Grabbe's insight here.

In his last works including *Hermann's Battle*, Grabbe makes an unexpected surrender to the spirit of the age, he shows how the claims of the masses can mould the lives of even the most frantic individualists. Both Hannibal, in the play of that name, and Hermann become ciphers on a chessboard of economic influence. And Hannibal is no vainglorious seeker after power, but an altruistic patriot, who even has a secret weakness for his enemies. Carthage is his hereditary home, but Rome his spiritual home! F. J. Schneider, in a recent biography, regards Grabbe as one of the swelling throng of heralds of the "*Führerprinzip*," and it is precisely on the altruism of Hannibal and Hermann that he bases a yet more startling claim, Grabbe's heroes are supposed to show "symptoms of an effort to suppress all personal and material interests for the benefit of the state-organized commonweal" (*zum Wohl des staatlich organisierten Volksganzen*). One need hardly say that the bulk of Grabbe's work scarcely serves such moral ends!

The change genuinely wrought in Grabbe's heroic ideal emerges most clearly, if comparison is made of his earlier Byronic types—the chaotic adolescents full of *Pubertätstrotz*, of whom Gothland is the finest example—with the more methodical, but equally terrible Sulla, and Henry VI. The hearts of the second species, though riven by passions as volcanic as Gothland's, yet seem encased in a chilly armour of rationalism. There is here a coalescence of traits, some of which are antipodal to the Byronic norm, impulsiveness, not deliberation, is the hall-mark of the Byronic individual. In view of the growing anæmia of the Byronic Man in Germany, such

an influx of fresh blood was very welcome. However crude his performance, Grabbe did help to lead the way from a debased Romanticism, to a more topical Realism. The treatment of finance in *Henry VI* is almost pure Balzac.

The development of Grabbe's turbid genius seems a simple affair to that of the erratic young Swabian poet, Wilhelm Waiblinger. In Waiblinger's work, as in Grabbe's, Byronism in the larger sense runs a parallel course with direct Byronic influence. The influences on his early work were exceedingly various, but mostly such as to arouse in the poet, a state receptive to Byronic suggestion. Holderlin refined his sentiment, Matthiesson presented him with a rococo palette, and from the period of Störin and Stress, Waiblinger borrowed his rich and fantastic bombast which, in its vapid Titanism, sometimes reads like a deliberate pastiche of the eighteenth-century writers.

"If I were only a whale, I would drain the mighty ocean to the last drop, and then spew it at the sun, that its beams might expire like those of a shabby, flickering will-o'-the-wisp."

Thus extravagant are the mouthings of Enrico, the enraged father, in Waiblinger's little-known drama, *Love and Hate*. Neither is the prime stimulant of every Byronic pose wanting—an unhappy love-episode. This took the form of his luckless attachment to Julie Michaelis in Tübingen. In a letter to his friend Wagner, in August, 1825, Waiblinger wrote the significant phrase, that Julie had "pined away, and been emaciated by my destructive passion."

The impression made on Waiblinger by reading

Byron's earlier works, is recorded in the diary for 1823. On July 3 he wrote, "I much resemble Byron." He was chiefly attracted by the verse-tales, which were to stand model, both in style and content, to his *Four Tales from the History of Contemporary Greece* (1825). The atmosphere of these pieces is reminiscent of *The Giaour*, though *The Bride of Abydos* was also tapped for certain images.

In *Kalonsore*, the first of the tales, the hero is intended to represent the author. As prisoner of war in Smyrna, he falls in love with Kalonsore, only to renounce his claim, when he learns that she already has a husband—at the moment on active service. Hereupon, Kalonsore improbably dies. The hero then inveighs against Fate, for having endowed him with the terrible bane which brings destruction upon his fellows, he even employs the outworn image of the vampire:

*"Kind, ach Kind! du bist verloren!
Denn ich bin ein Vampyr, muss
Allen, allen, die mich lieben
Leben, Blute, Blut, Gesundheit,
Schonheit, Jugend, Kraft entsaugen!"*

In the Preface to the *Tales*, more Byronic characteristics leap to the eye. The hero, though robbed of all by Fate, refuses to bow down before her cruel might. After his love has proved the doom of two women, he attains a qualified nirvana, where, though all desire is dead, he yet remains powerfully conscious of his own personality: "Here I stand, solitary, in an alien world. . . . I possess nothing, but boldly, proudly, I exclaim: I desire not a jot, Thou hast naught to give."

Not the least interesting portion of the whole work,

is the appendix, the story of *The Dying Corsair*. Despite its shamelessly Byronic title, it contains hints that the invention of the four previous tales had acted cathartically on Waiblinger's morbid state, and that the vein of satire which he was shortly to employ with dexterity in his prose, was already playing its part in his convalescence. Here is Byronism in its absurdest form. the dying corsair sees everything in the most Stygian hue; but, far from being heartfelt, his attitude springs from an unaffected wish!

"Abandoned and solitary, let my soul escape life's torture
Love and kindness I shall repay with ingratitude, for, on the
verge of the grave, I cannot bear not to be cruelly ill-treated "

And, with a supreme gesture, he bans the sun's rays from the scene of his death "My cloak shelters me from the light's illusion. Death must be received in silence and in darkness" F. Gluck is well justified in comparing the Waiblinger who wrote these lines with Heine, by heavily curtaining his windows, the youthful Heine bade the foul spirits of Old Night extend their reign over the hours of daylight! But Gluck is at sea, when he regards this irony as belonging to one of the *initial* stages of Byronism. On the contrary, this is a kind of Indian summer of melancholy, it is a late, and comparatively happy season which Lenau, for instance, was not permitted to enjoy, since his intellect was atrophied in mid-course. Waiblinger's irony, like Heine's, does not attest the superficial nature of his Byronism, but rather, that its possessor, thanks to his buoyant nature, could, in a comparatively short time, run through the whole gamut of Byronic phases, and attain the release of self-irony.

Nevertheless, Waiblinger's later work, his *Poems from*

Italy, still reveal his innate Byronism in the form of necrophily. Here too one meets the self-styled outcast, the "uninvited guest" on a hostile planet, who once remarks that if a god really created the earth, he could only have done so, "in order to receive appropriate admiration." But for his untimely demise, Waiblinger might have freed himself from this demon, just as he had already succeeded in mocking his external dependence on Byron out of existence. There are hints of this emancipation in the more objective poetry, and the carefree impressionism of the last pieces he composed in Naples and Sicily.

Waiblinger's return to realism is apparent in his two prose satires, with their humorous sub-titles—*Olura the Vampire, Recounting the marvellously Strange Rapport between a Somnambulant Cat and a Magnetic Flea*, and the less delicate *Three Days in the Underworld, A Booklet that will prove an Annoyance to Many, and had better be Published Anonymously* (1826). The first of these works only exists in MS. The cure is less complete in *Olura* than in *Three Days in the Underworld*. In the second work, there is hardly a phase in the Romantic code which does not receive its barbed thrust. Waiblinger's gift of parodying the hyper-Romantic is happily illustrated in the opening sentence:

"On a melancholy evening in autumn I was sitting, lost in reverie, in the churchyard, beneath an alder that had lost half its foliage, and was brooding over the destiny that so soon plays havoc with the lives of stormy mortals."

The unpublished *Olura* is a more personal record, wherein Waiblinger jests at his own tragic love for Julie Michaelis. For the theme of vampirism, Waiblinger

was indebted to the notorious tale by Polidori-Byron. Included in its German imitation are a number of outrageously sadistic poems. Though intended as burlesque in their context, these orgiastic outpourings are in themselves, terrible documents. They demonstrate conclusively to which division of the tripartite Byronic character Waiblinger was most in subservience. In the fifteenth poem Waiblinger tells how it seemed

*“Ich risse das Tuch dir vom Busen,
Und bohrt’ mit wollustiger Hand
Recht langsam und liebend und lachelnd
Dir einen Dolch in den zarten
In den heil’gen aufwogenden Busen—
Ich presste dich an mich, es strömte
Das reine, flutende Blut
Den weissen Leib dir herunter,
Du stohntest, ich aber druckte die Lippe
Dir flammend zu und nahm
Dein letztes Ach vom Munde,
Ich tranke mit wutigen Zugen
Den Purpurquell dir vom Busen,
Ich schlurfte mit Wollust das susse,
Das heisse, das wallende Blut.”*

By dwelling on the “sanctity” of his victim’s bosom, Waiblinger emphasizes the typically Byronic atmosphere of desecration

Very striking, in *Olura*, is the thumb-nail portrait of the hero. It is a delicate synthesis, which for the student of the Byronic Man, has a peculiar, an almost atavistic, completeness. In its close chiselling, it has a perfection that is *fin de siècle*. One senses the hand of the eclectic who stands psychically, if not chronometrically, at the very end of a literary movement, he resuscitates the dead

ideal, striving to compensate by fulness, the inevitable lack in intensity

The *Poems from Italy*, particularly the Odes and Elegies, attempt a melancholy re-creation of Roman glory. The funereal element in these pieces is inordinately large—suffused everywhere in the descriptions of crumbling tombs, standing stark against the colour-sated horizons of the Campagna. For Waiblinger, Rome was "the Great Churchyard." His apostrophe of the monument to Cæcilia Metella, as "thou sigh of Byron," proves in whose footsteps the disciple was treading. Waiblinger's innate Byronism seems to have been a compound of sadism and dandyism. His dandyism was however free of braggadocio, and was tempered in its literary reflection to a stiff dignity by his predilection for ancient metres, and his adoption of a highly stylized, obsolescent diction. The sadistic element took the form of necrophily. In his last poems, all the turbid idealism which he had ceased crystallizing into pasteboard, Byronic heroes, was now directed to the evocation of heroic landscapes. On the whole, this canalization was effective. Waiblinger's Odes and Elegies, though they linger on ruins, represent one of the less dreary by-paths of German Byronism. And these reveries, like the more frantic gloom of the earlier *Tales*, were only a passing phase. Waiblinger's ever healthier interest in common life is borne out by his last *Sicilian Elegies*.

*"Nicht von Heroen und Kriegern, von Königen oder Tyrannen,
Dion und Dionys und Timoleon nicht. ertönt mein Lied
Euch, o freundliche Wellen, entauscht den Saiten der Wohllaut,
Die ihr purpurnen Scheins lustig den Kahn mir umhupft"*

Or is this new note the ominous serenity of the moribund consumptive?

Chapter IV

BYRONIC POLITICIANS

*The Byron-cult amongst administrators—Political Variousness of the
Byronic Man—Benjamin Disraeli—Ferdinand Lassalle*

A NARROWLY psychological approach to problems of Byronism creates the illusory impression, that Byron himself lived in a universe, such as Henry James might have termed "just literary"—a universe of fleeting, neurotic interludes, rather than of historical events. Byron would have had some pithy things to say at such misrepresentation! If, in his poetry, he sometimes abandoned himself to a world of distraught shadows, there is yet no mistaking the substance of the man. How else can we explain the fascination that he has always exercised over statesmen and men of action, as well as over philosophers and æsthetes? Three of his staunchest, modern English admirers—James Elroy Flecker, Harold Nicolson, and Humbert Wolfe—are representatives of diplomacy, politics, and the civil service. Nor did the giants of nineteenth-century statecraft scorn him. Bismarck was wont to quote Byron in his letters to his wife. And Grillparzer tells how Metternich once repeated the entire Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold* to him *in English!*

For the English student however, the Byronic politician *par excellence* must always be Benjamin Disraeli,

whom it is tempting to compare with his great fellow-Jew, Ferdinand Lassalle.

It has been urged in a previous chapter that, by definition, the Byronic Man, like the Dionysiac Man, is no politician born, but that he may gravitate towards politics;⁴ either he wishes thereby to satisfy his craving for a power more substantial than he can exercise through art, or else he desires to escape the yoke of his Byronic ego, by establishing closer contact with his fellow-men. These inner necessities alone can hardly give him a party bias. Rather will his political allegiance be determined by accidents of family, race, and general social atmosphere. Two men, both Byronically stricken, may champion the most diverse political systems. Even so, their mental kinship is likely to become manifest, for in some measure they must adjust external political forms to their psychological composition. This process explains the many paradoxes evident in the careers of Disraeli and Lassalle. It required the wiliness of a Bismarck to perceive that the variegated husks cloaked identical kernels. . . .

"The old Jew! That's the man!" Terse, but uninspired, Bismarck's appraisal of the veteran English plenipotentiary at the Congress of Berlin has been chiefly remembered for its characteristic bluntness. Three years later, in April 1881, the German Chancellor again paid tribute to a great Jew—Ferdinand Lassalle, the Socialist agitator, who had died sixteen years before:

"He was one of the most intellectual and amiable men with whom I have ever had to do, ambitious in the grand style, and by no means a republican. His sympathies were unmistakably national and monarchical, and he aimed at the establishment of a German Empire. Here, then, we found a point of contact. . . ."

Amid laughter, Bismarck added that unfortunately, Ferdinand's allegiance to the monarchy had perhaps sometimes swerved from "the dynasty of Hohenzollern to that of Lassalle!"

Bismarck's praise was generous. Both Disraeli and Lassalle were at bottom his bitter foes. Friendship with Russia was essential for the Prussian policy of aggression on other fronts. Disraeli, anti-Russian, the fervent ally of the Porte, jeopardized a partnership vital to German diplomacy. And, at a time when Bismarck envisaged a fertile union of Church and Crown, and absolute rule by the reactionary Frederick William IV—guided indeed by a powerful landed aristocracy—an obscure Jew, mindful of the blood spilt in '48, dared to subvert the minds of the masses. Lassalle's visions of universal suffrage, and of state aid for industries, were anathema to the Prussian Chancellor. In each case however, Bismarck recognized the worth of his opponent, and chose to collaborate rather than to instigate a feud. His negotiations with Disraeli were, on the whole, fruitful, those with Lassalle, abortive; yet, personal contact deepened his respect for both.

In the quiet of his study he must often have pondered on that versatile stock that could bring forth a Tory Prime Minister in one country, and a President of the General Union of Workers in its neighbour. Of one thing we may be sure there was little venom in his mind as he mused on the great Hebrew of Breslau, and the greater of London. He may have decried Lassalle's politics, but, in his own phrase, he would have welcomed him as a "*Gutsnachbar*." A more signal honour awaited Disraeli. After the Congress of 1878, a portrait of the English statesman was hung in Bismarck's study—in excellent company. Pointing to this, and two adjoining

paintings, Bismarck would explain to the enquiring visitor: "My Sovereign, my wife, and my friend!"

Few men were at once so like and so dissimilar as Disraeli and Lassalle. The *milieu* from which they both emerged, held little promise of high office, though this is more especially true of Lassalle. Both were lucky enough to dispose of considerable fortunes. Both were race-proud, and yet cherished a sincere veneration for the country of their adoption. Both were knit to their families by strong ties of affection, both were powerfully influenced in early life by a fond father, and yet eschewed male friendship later, seeking in feminine society relaxation from the cares of "climbing the slippery pole." They were dandies. They were both great writers as well as great politicians. But take them all in all—Disraeli was a victor, if a tragic one, Lassalle—a mere flaunter of ragged banners; unless perhaps he was a deliberate self-victim.

When Lassalle was born in 1825, Disraeli, just of age, was already penning a brilliant first novel, *Vivian Grey*. This eccentric work was to carry Disraeli's fame far beyond the confines of his native country. Even Goethe flung himself upon the bizarre, Byronic tale and, with wonted finality, pronounced it the best thing since Scott. When, in 1864, the news of Lassalle's death in a duel paralysed the German Socialists, seventeen years of strenuous existence still awaited the ageing Disraeli. Lassalle, not yet forty when he met his fantastic end, was thus granted a span of life barely more than half Disraeli's, while his period of effective maturity was scarcely a third the length vouchsafed the Englishman. This time-factor must be well weighed, whenever Lassalle's multiple achievements are passed in review. The conclusion is plain. Disraeli's career may have been precocious and

magically sustained, but even his energies seem to dwindle, when compared with the strivings of his German rival.

Disraeli grew up in a more favourable environment than Lassalle. This does not necessarily imply that the England of the 'twenties pursued a more tolerant policy towards its Jewish inhabitants than the Germany of the 'forties. The English Jew of the period had no better prospect than his German cousin, of securing one of the coveted high offices of society. The emancipation of the German Jew effected by Napoleon had been quashed on the field of Waterloo. But the emancipation of the English Jew was to prove no less protracted. The Naturalization Act of 1753 was almost immediately repealed, and when, in 1830, Robert Grant attempted to institute a Bill in the House of Commons, designed to remove the civil and parliamentary disabilities under which English Jewry still laboured, the Upper House repeatedly rejected the measure, and so delayed its acceptance till 1858-60. Benjamin Disraeli however, entered the House as a Christian. Had Isaac D'Israeli not quarrelled with his Synagogue in 1817, England might have been poorer by a great statesman, and possibly the richer by a major of letters. The younger Disraeli did accept many implications of his new religion; Tory Democracy became imbued with the Christian ethic. Yet at heart, he remained true to Judaism. In his greater novels he uttered an eloquent plea for Pan-Semitism. It was he who regarded the Arab as "a Jew on horse-back."

Lassalle never suffered Christian baptism. Though disgusted with certain superstitions of his race, his immense pride precluded any bid for religious assimilation which was liable to misconstruction. Only once,

shortly before his death, did he envisage the possibility of turning Christian. In the stress of erotic turmoil, he made this concession to his love for Helene von Döniges.

Lassalle and Disraeli both inherited a strong Messianic strain. Disraeli was a well-nigh mystic believer in the ascendancy of World Jewry. His mouthpiece, Sidonia, the omniscient Jew and *deus ex machina* of *Coningsby*, unfolds a grandiose panorama of European diplomacy, where Jewish capital plays a dominant part in the rise of courts and the downfall of empires. If Disraeli held that the Jews might be liberated, thanks to the subtle interweavings of commerce and politics, Lassalle's more turbulent spirit toyed with the thought of armed revolt. In one entry in the early *Tagebuch*, he states that he would not shrink from the scaffold itself, could he but raise the Jews to the level of a respected race. In after years, as his sympathies widened, Lassalle began to advocate a more general liberation of mankind. At the same time, his youthful combativeness assumed the character of a peculiarly intellectual ferocity. Disraeli too, fought rather with weapons of the mind, yet, for all his urbanity, Sidonia—the idealized Disraeli—is no mean worshipper of the Lord of Hosts. "Perhaps you may think there are greater things than war. I do not . . ."

When Disraeli and Lassalle entered politics, they had two goals in view: personal aggrandizement and the service of their fellows. Each elected to advocate the interests of a class. While Disraeli assisted in the rejuvenation of an effete Conservatism, Lassalle sought to organize an uncomprehending proletariat. Both coveted power instinctively, but whereas Disraeli triumphed, and in the very fulness of his triumph tasted disillusionment, Lassalle only enjoyed victories of the mind. The sub-

stance of power eluded him, and as he felt his grasp on affairs loosening, his ambitions became ever more disproportioned to his prospects. When he died, his mind was clouded by insane dreams; Bismarck's sneer at the Lassalle dynasty was not without foundation.

The antinomy represented by Lassalle's and Disraeli's political programmes, is by no means complete. While Disraeli voiced Conservative ideas, he was no Die-Hard champion of narrow party interests. He only sanctioned the rule of a Young England aristocracy, because he sincerely believed that, in his day, such rule could also best ameliorate the lot of the people. Tory Democracy was not intended as a catch-phrase, hawked round the country prior to an election, and then speedily forgotten, it was to be a living doctrine, such as had been elaborated by his sworn enemy, Carlyle. It was in this sense that Coningsby wished to return to the feudal principle, believing that "the essence of tenure is the performance of duty."

Neither here, nor in Coningsby's desire to eliminate parliamentarianism, can one detect any obvious affinities with Lassalle's political economy. Yet, Disraeli's wish to abolish the "Venetian Constitution," which he thought had been in force in England ever since the accession of the House of Hanover, was symptomatic of his endeavours to create a full-fledged British monarchy, at the expense of the previous "Italian Dogeship." And an important nexus can thus be established between Disraeli and Lassalle, on the assumption that Disraeli viewed the monarchy as a classless institution. "The only power that has no class sympathy is the Sovereign." Indeed, Disraeli vowed that the only possible bias in a king was a democratic one, for "the proper leader of the people is the individual who sits upon the throne."

When Disraeli urged the necessity for close co-operation between the Crown and the people, he was voicing a sacred personal creed, when Lassalle echoed this sentiment in Germany, he did so under the pressure of political circumstance.

Lassalle's attitude towards the Crown is best gauged through the medium of his conversations with Bismarck. Unfortunately, there is no full record of these negotiations, but since the discovery, in 1928, of the correspondence between the two principals, many obscurities have been elucidated. Contrary to earlier belief, it was Bismarck, not Lassalle, who first took the initiative. Once Bismarck had set the ball rolling, Lassalle made the most—too much indeed—of his opportunities. Rejecting his suppliant pose, he adopted the stance of an equal. At the last, his fatal pride did him grave injury. The Chancellor acknowledged receipt of Lassalle's chief work in the field of economic theory, *The System of Acquired Rights*, not personally, but through his secretary, whereupon Lassalle took umbrage, sent a note of reproof, and—Bismarck's hospitable gates and roomy cigar-boxes were closed upon him for ever! It is scarcely surprising that the conversations should have terminated thus. The true miracle is that they should ever have begun. Their initiation by Bismarck bears testimony to the intellectual force and social persuasiveness possessed by the young agitator, which enabled him to retrieve a career sordidly commenced.

Lassalle's early life was an affair of fits and starts, of indecision, sudden impulse, immense laziness, occasional dissipation, and fierce hatreds. At the *Gymnasium* in Breslau, he had proved himself a creature of brilliant intuitions, but completely unamenable to discipline. He displayed a curious inclination to hector his mentors,

just as later he browbeat his judges, and even his jailors! He left the school in ill-odour, and his unhappy father sent him thence to the Commercial Academy in Leipzig. Ferdinand would have preferred Hamburg for, like all the Ashkenazim, his eyes were orientated towards the west. At Leipzig he became yet more quarrelsome, and, like Goethe before him, something of a fop. Once more he quitted his academy hurriedly. Next he matriculated in Berlin, but soon decided there was not a single professor worth hearing; accordingly, he began to study on his own, laying the foundations of those Hegelian theories which he was later to turn to good account, both in the philological and the political sphere.

Characteristically, at the age of twenty-one, he suddenly left his books, and with no specialized legal training, ventured into the courts to fight a grim and protracted battle. The struggle was to last a decade, during which Lassalle's name became sadly besmirched. But he won the case, and though he had gained the reputation of being a contentious young rowdy, and suffered a short term of imprisonment in Düsseldorf, he had also gained the lifelong gratitude of Sophie, Countess of Hatzfeldt, whom he had rescued from an unbearable matrimonial situation. His efforts on behalf of the unfriended Countess, have that same touch of almost quixotic chivalry, instinct in Disraeli.

By a curious irony, Lassalle was snug in prison during the tumultuous days of '48. Had he then been at liberty, and rash enough to follow his bent, he would at least have suffered a long spell of banishment. As it was, he was then held in safe custody, to fight another day. Yet, if he had gained a powerful friend in the Countess Hatzfeldt, he could not escape the bitter truth that his name stank in the popular press. How could he retrieve

the position and storm the *salons* of Berlin? *The Philosophy of Heraclitus the Obscure of Ephesus* was his answer. There were those in Berlin who for the sake of this brilliant application of the Hegelian method to the old Greek fragments, were willing to forget Lassalle's nauseous past. Even Humboldt proved cordial, while the academic crew, Boeckh and Lepsius, were amazed at the youngster's erudition.

Lassalle was at last launched on his meteoric career of pregnant oratory and forensic strife. Even before Lassalle had founded the General Union of German Workers, Bismarck had realized that here was a force to be reckoned with. What common interest drew these two ill-assorted figures together? There was at least their conjoint opposition to the policy of the *Fortschrittler*, the hated *bourgeois* Progressives, whose chief economist, Schulze-Delitzsch, Lassalle repeatedly pilloried in his pamphlets. Schulze-Delitzsch was the champion of a vigorous co-operative movement, which Bismarck feared. The Progressive watchword was "Self-help"; to which Lassalle rejoined "State-aid for industry!" At the same time, Lassalle clamoured for the substitution of universal suffrage for the old "three-class" system of election. Bismarck, about to embark on his Danish campaign, and already meditating his larger Austrian venture, was willing to make concessions to the workers, for the sake of internal stability, during a period of external crisis. He was fully aware of Lassalle's fine talent for organization, and realized that, in parleying with the enemy, he had everything to gain and nothing to lose.

The conversations between Bismarck and Lassalle ended abruptly, and their immediate effect was nil. Yet, Lassalle's wounded vanity was not the only factor

responsible for this failure. Bismarck seized an obvious pretext under the pressure of the external events crowding upon him. The Danish crisis was maturing more rapidly than he had expected. Questions of internal policy had to be shelved. Lassalle, too, was hampered by the imminence of the greatest crisis in his own life. He was madly in love with Helene von Dönniges. To the end he sent urgent messages to Bismarck the introduction of universal suffrage must prelude the Danish war; there must be a lightening of the burden of indirect taxation, the royal exchequer must finance state industries. How strange that such a programme should have been laid before Bismarck by the colleague of Marx! (At bottom he was repeating the arguments of the Chartists, and supporting them with the economics of Buchez.) The Marxists have never forgiven him this "treachery". "Lassalle may not have regarded himself as such, but, objectively, he was undoubtedly an agent of Bismarck in the camp of the working class, a traitor to the workers' movement." This verdict, written in 1934, represents orthodox Communist opinion. Marx himself was hardly less severe, for, of course, "Itzig" was supposed to have stolen all his ideas from the exile in London. But Marx had more vision than his followers. He was convinced that, when Lassalle urged the workers to shelter beneath the ægis of a benevolent Prussian monarchy, the German demagogue was merely resorting to inspired temporary measures. "Lassalle was too intelligent to regard this slogan as anything but a makeshift."

Here then, in some sort, Lassalle resembles Disraeli. He envisages a state of which the two poles are the Crown and the people, but whereas Disraeli is convinced that this represents the ideal social covenant, Lassalle looks longingly ahead to the more enlightened epoch,

when a factitious monarchy shall have given way to a natural one. He dreams of the day when "Ferdinand, Chosen of the People" shall drive in triumph through the Brandenburger Tor, while the workers, with glances of admiration for Helene sitting at his side, huzza: "*Es lebe die Republik und ihre goldlockige Präsidentin! . . .*"

An important distinction between Disraeli and Lassalle, lies in their varying attitude towards the Church. Disraeli, in whom there is much natural piety, a deal of sentiment, and not a little sentimentality, allows the Church wider scope in his political scheme than does Lassalle. For Disraeli, the Church is "the medium by which the despised and degraded classes assert the native equality of man, and vindicate the rights and power of intellect." But, despite the rhetoric of *Coningsby*, Disraeli was probably more aware of the social utility of the cleric, than of his metaphysical mission. Lassalle, owing perhaps to his rigid philosophical schooling, gave little thought to organized religion. In this, as in more concrete matters of economics, his approach was too exclusively intellectual to arouse enthusiasm in the masses. Lassalle's suspicion of emotion ultimately proved of great disservice, for, when passion did at the last overwhelm him, he had to grapple with an entirely new medium. The mere prospect of sexual defeat, made his fine reason crumble overnight. Oddly, Disraeli's ideal of manhood, Sidonia, is also a being "without affections," who holds, indeed, that emotions are "the children of ignorance; when the horizons of our experience expand, and models multiply, love and admiration imperceptibly vanish." Disraeli was probably moved to dwell on this trait in Sidonia's composition, conscious that his own danger, the reverse of Lassalle's, lay rather in a surfeit of sentiment.

Disraeli worked a good deal of this superfluous sentiment out of his system in his earlier novels. No one who studies Disraeli's fiction as a whole—from *Vivian Grey* (1826), to *Endymion* (1880)—can fail to be enthralled by this abundant record of the author's inner development. The madcap style of the earlier tales written in the shadow of Byron—*Vivian Grey*, *The Young Duke*, *Contarini Fleming*—contrasts markedly with the sober exposition of political truths, and the vast social panoramas, exhibited in the novel-trilogy of the 'forties—*Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*.

Nowhere is the difference between Disraeli and Lassalle more clearly reflected than in their style. In his youth, Disraeli's style is impish and garrulous; in his maturity—florid, urbane, and occasionally pompous. Lassalle, trumpet-tongued, seems the very mouthpiece of impassioned Science, yet his style is everywhere more disciplined, his periods scrupulously elaborated. Each sentence is militant, and half a dozen read consecutively on almost any page, suffice to create the impression of a mind ruthlessly bent on intellectual conquest. Lassalle has no time for pathos and empty rhetoric. It is difficult to find a superfluous word in the reports of his speeches; for Lassalle rarely spoke extempore, unless it were to crush a heckler or rebuke a judge. His lengthy, popular addresses were written out in full and memorized!

Both men have a predilection for superlative statement. Both have a fondness for the heroic adjective. They strive to stretch their everyday existence to an epic standard. Thus Lassalle is for delivering "intellectual cudgel-blows" (*geistige Keulenschläge*). He makes great play with epithets of sound and fury, like *ungeheuer*, *grasslich*, *immens*. For Disraeli, similarly, Westminster

is the theatre of a grim conflict. "There is to be war to the knife when the Houses meet. . . . Gladstone is to rush into the arena; but Lowe is to be awful—crushing, overwhelming. . . ." And again: "To-morrow is the great battle of Armageddon, when it will be decided who governs England, I or the newspapers. . . ." These are not the ebullitions of an overwrought political tyro. They show the mettle of the tried warrior of seventy, and reflect something of Sidonia's relish for real combat.

Both Disraeli and Lassalle grew up under the spell of Byron, and in early life they conformed outwardly, as well as inwardly, to the Byronic model. Both were vain of their personal appearance, and, if Israel Zangwill's lavish description in *Dreamers of the Ghetto* may be trusted, Lassalle had reason for his claim to be "the handsomest man of all time." Further, Lassalle's dress bills were as heavy as Disraeli's, if not quite so colourful. But he lacked Disraeli's superb self-confidence, and found it necessary to rationalize his sartorial whims. Thus, even in the early *Tagebuch*, he recorded his intention to dress exquisitely, "to impress other people—not to please myself." Later, when friends suggested it was inadvisable for a demagogue to wear evening dress whilst haranguing ill-clad workers, Lassalle retorted that, on the contrary, it was vital to show the proletarians what they were missing!

Like Byron, both Disraeli and Lassalle accomplished a lengthy eastern tour. As they approached the Orient, they were perplexed by strange racial intuitions. Disraeli journeyed far up the Nile, and then visited Jerusalem, where he felt overwhelmed by past associations. Lassalle approached the east *via* the Danube, and penetrated into Turkey. He found a sense of affinity with the

Turks creeping upon him, and, after witnessing a Dervish dance, he wrote in a moment of self-revelation:

"(The Dervishes) give expression to the original religious consciousness of the Semites, to the religious philosophy peculiar to the Semitic temperament, to the feeling of utter worthlessness and nullity, of overwhelming penitence, and abasement."

If this statement has more than subjective validity, it raises some curious issues as to the relationship between the Hebraic temperament and the development of later Byronism in Europe. . . .

While Lassalle felt himself drawn towards the Turks, Disraeli was more at home with the Arabs, and the mountain tribes of the Balkans. It is almost certain that Disraeli's pro-Turkish policy in later life was governed not by his immediate racial instincts (as his opponents suggested), but rather by a sense of England's real needs in Near Eastern diplomacy, for he regarded the Turks as racially inferior to the Arabs they oppressed.

It is strange to find the harbinger of a Utopia referring, as Lassalle did in Turkey, to a "feeling of utter worthlessness and nullity." The self-righteous critic is tempted to exclaim: "So much for Lassalle's brave words! His philosophy had no ethical core. His beliefs were shams. Here at last is the clue to Lassalle's failure and Disraeli's success. It may be fashionable to sneer at Disraeli's fulsome sentiment, yet its power sustained him through many a trial, where Lassalle's intellectualism would have brought him to grief." There may be some truth in this. However, Disraeli's early works are just as instinct with pessimism. Perhaps it is not a pessimism of a very serious order. Disraeli may have dabbled in grief, as he dabbled in cravats. Lassalle's pessimism on the

other hand was partly rational, and to that extent no doubt, incurable.

In Disraeli's case one is almost tempted to believe in G. K. Chesterton's paradox, that Byronism is incidental to youth and high spirits. For, though Disraeli knows all the tricks of the trade, and threads his early novels with lengthy apostrophes to Satiety and Ennui, he seems interested in the Byronic pose, more as a romantic artifice, than as a psychological condition. He holds that the eccentric Byronic traveller is good copy, the gloomy Byronic philosopher—a bore. When not engaged in political intrigue or travel, the heroes of these tales live in an atmosphere of "races, archery feats, and county balls." If however they get into a scrape—and they frequently do—their despair is of that exaggerated type which is patently insincere. If Byronism be no more than an elegant perversion of sentiment, then Disraeli may well exclaim:

"To brood over misery—to flatter yourself that there is not a single being who cares for your existence. . . . Oh! there is wild witchery in it, which I doubt whether opium can reach, and am sure that wine cannot."

There is much outcry, too, in the early novels, against the evils of predestination. But this marks a brief phase in Disraeli's development. Vivian Grey believes himself the hapless instrument of cosmic forces. But even in this first work, the rather spineless Vivian is contrasted with the self-made dictator, Beckendorff, who dismisses Destiny and Chance as "idle words." In *The Young Duke*, however, there are some passages of more heart-felt bitterness—an arraignment of the author's own futile career, and of the transience of life at large.

Once he had entered the strenuous field of politics,

Disraeli's moodiness left him, and though, in 1837, he wrote *Venetia*, a full-length novel dealing with the lives of Byron and Shelley, it is significant that his treatment of Byron was superficial. Only when he sat, none too securely, at the top of "the slippery pole," and from that eminence saw there were no more worlds left to conquer, gloom occasionally returned. A youthful phase of Byronism often seems to repeat itself in old age, as though that self-questioning which is a preparation for life, may also be a foretoken of death. When Mary Anne died, the old statesman became very lonely. "Loneliness" is a word which echoes like a knell in the correspondence with Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield. Disraeli was cager for affection, and to the last he fought tenaciously for it.

Lassalle was far more prone than Disraeli, to morbid imaginings. His pathological coveting of fame, his fits of scepticism, his too vivid sense of his Jewish "otherness," and his fatalistic belief that those who fight in the vanguard of mankind are doomed to destruction—all stamp him as a neurotic personality. The conviction that altruism necessarily entails self-immolation, may have had some bearing on Lassalle's own tragic end. He gave expression to this ill-starred faith in his drama *Franz von Sickingen*, basing his imagery on the well-known Roman legend of Curtius:

"Die Besten müssen springen in den Riss der Zeit,
 Nur über ihren Leibern schliesst er sich,
 Nur ihre Leiber sind der seltnen Samen,
 Aus dem der Völkerfreiheit uppige Pflanze
 Grundend hervorschießt, eine Welt befruchtend
 Das ist der Fluch, der auf den Besten lastet,
 Dämonisch sie und was sich ihnen naht
 Dem finsternen Verderben weicht."

Moreover, Lassalle's Hegelian interpretation of the philosophy of Heraclitus, bristles with pitfalls for an introspective mind. Nietzsche, too, was conscious of the Dark Philosopher's lure. A. Schirokauer, in a recent book on Lassalle, has pointed out that the cosmos in a state of flux mooted by Heraclitus, may well have been welcomed for personal reasons by the descendant of Polish ghetto-dwellers. It suggested a thoroughly unstable society, which might prove a happy hunting-ground for even the obscurest *arriviste*! But there is a gloomier side to the picture. Lassalle ominously defines the central ethic principle of Heraclitus, as "mediation with the Negative," and a frenzied application of the dialectic method leads to the assumption that life is identical with death! An over-long philosophical vision often paralyses action, and confounds normal values. The oriental mind seems peculiarly liable to adhere to a system where extremes meet, and cancel each other out: a belief in Spinoza's One-Substance tends to diminish the immediate worth of any one aspect of that Substance; in the Hindu religion, Siva, Lord of Change, convinces his devotees that their present state is abject; similarly, the restless universe of Heraclitus has little significance at any single moment, but only when perceived as an inhuman continuum. . . .

Nowhere does Disraeli's healthier sense of reality emerge more clearly, than in his relations with women. Lassalle always remained a sexual adolescent. Disraeli strove betimes to clear his mind of sentimental cant. In the *Home Letters*, written to his sister during his Mediterranean travels, he averred: "I may commit many follies in life, but I never intend to marry for 'love,' which I am sure is a guarantee of infelicity." In marrying the wealthy Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, he

probably kept this early vow. Yet, Disraeli still felt the need for a feminine ideal. He sought the companionship of women of gentle breeding, endeavouring to maintain a tranquil relationship, founded on mutual admiration, and unsullied by any fiercer emotion. Though he subdued the romantic yearnings of his adolescence, his attitude towards women always remained tinged with mysticism. He believed that in their social functions, they assumed the rôle of "Priestesses of Predestination."

Something of this mysticism can be traced in the innumerable female agents who seem ultimately to control the political machinations rife in his novels, but above all, it pervaded Disraeli's relations with "The Faery"—Queen Victoria. The principle of the monarchy alone called forth his deepest veneration, but when he found that principle embodied in a woman, there was added to his respect for the institution, a nostalgia for the splendour of Elizabethan chivalry. Here is the source of that strange mixture of paternalism and humility, which coloured the Prime Minister's intercourse with his Sovereign.

To the end, there remained in him a strong undercurrent of emotionalism, ever liable to well up above the placid surface of Victorian convention. The correspondence he exchanged in his last years with the sisters, Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield, is the remarkable record of an old man's affection. Day after day, from the country places of the aristocracy, from Hughenden, from Downing Street, from the very floor of the House itself, Disraeli penned his last love-letters. Much was mere political gossip, but it is all the stranger to come upon the ardent protestations which punctuate this unpromising material.

"So I must bid farewell to my mighty beeches, brown with impending doom, and the golden limes showering in a sou-wester their amber floods, and the horse chestnuts rattling with their beautiful but useless fruit. All will be forgotten in a few days like a dream—but you I shall never forget, and never cease to love!"

The calm, elegiac tone marks the concluding phase of that warm friendship, which had sustained Disraeli amid the manifold cares of office. It is a note we miss in the tempestuous loves of Lassalle. In his many affairs, Lassalle was something of an opportunist, just as, for all the integrity of his message, he was also an opportunist in politics. His relations with Agnes Denis-Street may serve as the type of his lesser intrigues. The daughter of a diplomat, and a pupil of Liszt, this young lady was well fitted to furnish her lover with exquisite sensation, as well as with political gossip. He accepted both with equal egotism. There was a good deal of the amoral speculator in his nature. The advance information on economic tendencies he gleaned from Miss Denis-Street, was passed on simultaneously to Karl Marx, and to Lassalle's banker!

Though he claimed utter surrender, and "religious devotion," from every attractive woman of his acquaintance, Lassalle balked at marriage. Here, as in several other major aspects of life, he suffered from a psychological incapacity, a fear of maturity. His makeshift education, with its constant change of scene, was symbolic of his dread to "settle down" and find a permanent niche in life. This accounts for his many bizarre projects and ill-assorted hobbies. Once, he even set about translating the Ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, but found the hieroglyphics too stubborn of their secrets! He could be a derring-do lover till the game was won,

but then he slackened pace notably, approaching marriage with the greatest circumspection. A curious letter is extant, wherein Lassalle proposes to Sophie Sontzoff. The tone is ardent, and yet there is also a strange eagerness to dwell upon the cares and trials that may await his prospective bride. Disguised as quixotic honesty, this self-vilification is the last defence of his imperilled ego.

Lassalle wrote love-letters of horrific length. Yet, in all the spate of rhetoric, there is little evidence of genuine tenderness on his part, instead, there is much rationalization of his erotic passion, the obdurate female heart is bombarded with intellectual argument, intended to "prove" the morality of the lover's desperate claims. Everywhere there are symptoms of a dangerous confusion of emotion and intellect. What woman's heart was ever wrung by an ultimatum of this nature?—

"Auf der Seite Deiner Weigerung steht die Unsittlichkeit des in seiner Einzelheit verharren wollenden Ichs, die Irreligiosität Wähle!"

This portentous phrase occurs in a letter to Lonni Grodzka, and perhaps it helps to explain the final tragedy of Lassalle's love for Helene von Donniges.

It is difficult to gauge how deeply Lassalle cared for the nineteen-years-old Helene. He was certainly enamoured, as never before, of the girl's name and heritage. She represented for Lassalle, the ruling caste in the country where he must perforce carve out his career—the caste of his quasi-ally, Bismarck! In his letters, he addressed her as "Brunnhilde," and his telegrams were signed "Siegfried." Is not this pathetically more than a romantic conceit? For Lassalle beheld in her, not merely a lovely spouse, but the divine instrument

of his social rehabilitation, she was to be the symbol that, Jew though he was, he had gained the right to wield power in the German nation. She could perhaps breathe the "Open Sesame," which might liberate him from his Byronic "otherness." On the purely physical plane, Helene, extremely Teutonic in appearance (rather like Lady Bradford!), exercised over her lover that exotic attraction which the Nordic woman must necessarily hold for the Hebrew. But Lassalle was not merely dazzled by Nordic beauty, he was also a fervent admirer of the "Nordic" energies. Already in his youth he had sung the praises of the Norseman, expatiating in *Franz von Sickingen* on the sterling qualities of "*Germanenblut*." Ironically, it was a Semite who in this instance anticipated Nietzsche!

Though Lassalle underestimated the opposition that would be forthcoming from the caste to which Helene belonged, he alone was responsible for the ultimate disaster. He, the rationalist, who had proscribed duels as against the dictates of common sense, fought a duel, and was killed. Thanks to that fundamental error that had attended him all his days, the confusion of intellect with emotion, he was unable to keep his intellect aloof from his engrossing passion.⁵ "My fate be on your head, Helene," he wrote, criminally blind to the possibility that his correspondence, which elicited no reply, was being withheld from his intended wife, and that she was being kept close prisoner by her parents. In the dying man's pockets, a very different statement was found, written apparently on the fatal morning, to shield his opponent if need be. "I declare that I alone am responsible for my death.—F. Lassalle."

The itch for self-destruction Lassalle detected in the Dervish dance, was curiously paralleled in his own life-

rhythm Already in the days of the *Tagebuch*, he was obsessed by the idea of suicide After witnessing a local performance of *Hamlet*, young Ferdinand made the revealing entry "Oh! Every particle in me cries 'Not to be!'"

And so, Lassalle died obscurely, while Disraeli, who had mastered the art of self-discipline, and thereby his truculent Byronism, was launched on his triumphant career Yet racially, as well as socially, he was more favoured than the Messiah of Breslau. The lad Benjamin could mature in the dignified shelter of Isaac D'Israeli's study. How different was the home in Breslau of old Heymann Lassal, the Yiddish silk-merchant, whose very name, prior to Ferdinand's addition of the French suffix, identified him with Loslau, the dim little village in the Upper Silesian district of Rybnik, where he had been born Associating, day-in day-out, with an undistinguished father, who lived solely for his accounts, with a nagging mother, and an hysterical sister, Lassalle was bound to magnify his own precocious personality to the verge of megalomania. From his father's fastidious lips, young Disraeli caught only the fine, patrician idiom of the eighteenth century, just as his ancestors had spoken only the purest Castilian But "*Ferdinandleben*" could pick up nothing but the hissing Silesian dialect, rendered yet more uncouth by mingled scraps of Hebrew and Yiddish There is no record of the time when Disraeli was a youngster, full of animal spirits, it would almost appear that he was born in the *salon*—a polished gentleman from the day he was first breeched But in the *Tagebuch*, Lassalle has drawn himself as a repulsive young ruffian, full of guile and deceit, whose only good qualities were his astounding candour and his affection for his father. And far too much of the haggling

of Petticoat Lane has intruded into this document of adolescence. Such meanness, Disraeli escaped.

The difference between Disraeli and Lassalle is largely racial. Disraeli was descended from the Sephardim, the then aristocrats of World Jewry. His ancestors were already men of culture when they moved from Spain to Venice during the Inquisition. Lassalle was the scion of the inferior Ashkenazim. This inferiority was not, of course, absolute. Indeed, when they settled in London, the Ashkenazim soon ousted the great Spanish and Portuguese families. But owing to his historical evolution, "the abject Polander"—as Isaac D'Israeli called him—remained inferior, as long as he was domiciled on the Continent.

Thanks to his father's successful literary career, Benjamin Disraeli entered society with a respected name and powerful friends. Moreover, the monarchical bent of the youth's mind, was strengthened by Isaac's *Commentaries on the Life and Reign of Charles I*—a work which gained for the father the honorary degree of D.C.L. of the University of Oxford, whilst its Royalist conclusions stirred the imagination of the son.

Supposing Ferdinand Lassalle had been born in England, and had enjoyed Disraeli's social advantages, might he not have emulated the English statesman's sentimental Conservatism? Perhaps, even so, his mercurial temperament would have borne him to early disaster, perhaps it would have led him to dizzy heights of autocracy. In Germany, on the other hand, he would have been disowned by the land-owning class from the outset. It was part of his tragedy, indeed, that he was disowned by both camps alike. The stern, posthumous verdict of Marx and Engels, could be heard in substance while Lassalle was yet alive. Twice he was refused

admittance to the Communist League, on the ground that his sentiments were still "too monarchical"! One is reminded of Sidonia's proud words: "The Jews are a race essentially . . . monarchical . . . essentially Tories."

Those contemporary critics who impugned Lassalle's attitude, rarely looked beyond the issues of party strife. They did not perceive how Lassalle's apparent vacillation in politics, mirrored the conflict in his soul. Lassalle was foredoomed to disaster. Who espouses the cause of the untutored masses, without first subduing his Byronic self, essays the welding of incompatibles.

Chapter V

NIHILISM AND NIETZSCHE

Romantic and Buddhist Pessimism—Schopenhauer his belated influence—Wagner's distortion of Schopenhauer—The paradox of Nietzsche's Conquest of Nihilism

IN the eyes of the chronologomaniac, pessimism in Germany in the nineteenth century, falls into three "periods." He believes that Romantic Pessimism—sponsored by Rousseau, developed by Byron, and sung to its grave by Heine and his contemporaries—endured till the middle of the century; that thence until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, the prophets of melancholy seceded to the profounder, Buddhist Pessimism of Wagner and Schopenhauer. And he would conclude that in the remaining thirty years, allegiance was owed to a bewildering variety of pessimistic cross-currents. Nietzsche, it is true, endeavoured to stay the rot with his creed of the Superman, but, ultimately, he involved himself in a nihilism as abysmal as Schopenhauer's, while many of the Naturalists, no less than the Neo-Romantics, harked back to a sentimental despair, reminiscent of the opening decades of the century.

This outline of the development of German pessimism can be accepted as accurate, as long as it is realized that the advent of each new "period" never involved

the summary truncation of the old. The Byronic spirit, or its many adaptations, continued to agitate the German mind throughout the century. Nietzsche, like Byron in certain moods, claimed to be a scavenger, a hygienist. Like Byron, he too, groped dimly amongst constructive purposes, which he never more than adumbrated. Schopenhauer on the other hand, expounded a viciously negative doctrine, innocent of any ameliorative afterthought. He thus represents the nadir of German pessimism.

After 1870, the gap between German life and German letters widened perceptibly. There was a cult of exotic literature. To repeat the old dictum—France's military defeat at home was offset by the triumph of Gallic wit in Germany. Naturalism did something to mend this divorce between art and life, but its results were transient. In the 'nineties, the gulf yawned wider than ever. The average German citizen of the day, a disciple of materialism proudly conscious of the imperial growth of his nation, and of its scientific triumphs, sought relaxation from a strenuous existence, in the virtuous pages of *Die Gartenlaube*, and in a spate of mediocre novels. But the intelligentsia looked in vain in the domain of *belles-lettres* for a fitting reflection of the spirit of the age. Instead of the epic vigour one would expect in the poetry of an expanding realm, elegiac lassitude and half-apologetic perversion ran riot. After *fin de siècle*, the first decade of the new century provided a measure of respite, though the false calm was soon rent by prophecies of Armageddon. The chauvinistic ebullitions of 1914 were drowned in a flood of dramas and lyrics, in which the agony of the War years found expression. German literature continued full of horrors and grotesqueries, till after the inflation period. Then came an era of

recuperation, rich in satire. The books of this age often have a vitriolic exterior that conceals a wry, Heinesque waggishness. Such was the first quaking foundation for the Nazi literature of affirmation.

The Slough of Despond into which the German mind was plunged by the Great War, affected the major part of the nation. A century earlier, Schopenhauer had endeavoured to lure the Teutons into the bottomless pit of nirvana. But his only weapon was philosophy; and to philosophy, most men will always turn a deaf ear. Schopenhauer lacked the prepotent, material agencies which, in times of war, mould men's minds willy-nilly. While, therefore, the tragedy of 1914-18 impressed itself on the popular mind, and yielded a rich literary harvest, Schopenhauer's jeremiads remained almost without echo, save in the music of Wagner. Much of his thought was however later amplified by Nietzsche, the Russian novelists, and Thomas Mann.

Schopenhauer was born in 1788—the same year as Byron! Seeing that Byron's work laboured under the handicap of translation, it seems remarkable that the poet should have won recognition in Germany *several decades* before the philosopher became known beyond a very narrow circle of friends. There is a tradition that the two men caught a glimpse of each other from their gondolas, when they were staying in Venice in 1818. It was fitting that their paths should touch, if only for a fleeting instant; for, together, they stand unrivalled as moulders of German pessimism. But in so far as that pessimism found expression in general literature, the influence of Byron, not of Schopenhauer, was predominant. Novelists and poets (even German poets!), are always more liable to be enslaved by colourful rhetoric, than by sober dialectic.

There are manifold reasons for the slow growth of Schopenhauer's fame. In the first place, like Nietzsche, the teutonized Pole, Schopenhauer can hardly be regarded as a true German. His ancestors, both on his father's and his mother's side were Dutch, and he was born in Danzig at a time when the Venice of the North was still a free, republican city. The Prussians were indeed already knocking at the gates. But even if Schopenhauer had been more fully a German, by blood and by birth, the temper of his philosophy must have restrained any innate patriotic ardour. Yet the most considerable factor which militated against his popularity, was the way in which he held intentionally aloof from German academic ranks. This was a graver crime than any mere eccentricity of system, and Schopenhauer paid dearly for it. There was a conspiracy of silence over the publication of *The World as Will and Idea* in 1818, so that the impatient author had to wait a generation for the second edition.

Recognition, when it at length came, was accorded abroad, rather than in Germany itself. In February, 1839, Schopenhauer learned that he had won the prize, offered by the Scientific Society of Trondhjem, for a discussion of the question, "Whether free-will could be proved from the evidence of consciousness." A further fourteen years were to elapse before his reputation was definitely established, not now in Norway, but in England. Even then there could be no question of popularity. The Britons who flocked to the Great Exhibition, and sometimes listened smugly to the sermons of Carlyle, were deaf to alien messages of woe. However, John Oxenford's article on "Iconoclasm in German Philosophy," (*Westminster Review*, April, 1853), was a more generous tribute than Schopenhauer had as yet

received in his own country. Oxenford, an autodidact, had gained esteem as dramatic critic of *The Times*, and as a translator of Goethe and Calderon. His article, besides making Schopenhauer known in England, actually stimulated German interest in the new sage. It encouraged Julius Frauenstädt to complete his *Letters Concerning Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (1854), which drew Wagner's attention to the new movement. Indeed, Wagner himself once asserted to Liszt, that the Englishman's balanced estimate had prejudiced him in Schopenhauer's favour!

Just as there are reasons for the retardation of Schopenhauer's fame, so there are reasons for the cosmopolitan character of his reputation. Schopenhauer had travelled widely in his youth, and was a considerable linguist. Above all he was an admirer of the English tongue and the English character. He read *The Times* regularly, employed English for his methodical keeping of accounts, and finally settled in Frankfurt rather than in Mannheim, because in the former city there were "more Englishmen." An unabashed eclectic, Schopenhauer also owed a considerable debt to English philosophy. His indebtedness to oriental mysticism was no doubt greater; his belief in the vanity of all things was based above all on Anquetil Duperron's Latin translation of a Persian version of the Sanskrit *Upanishads*, published in 1801-2. But he also found congenial company in the ancients, in Cabanis and Helvétius, in Leopardi, while, unlike most of the Hegelians, he was well versed in Hobbes, Berkeley, and Priestley. Though he assumed the cosmic paramountcy of Will, he was no less eager to deny the freedom of the individual will—a belief for which he found substantiation in Priestley.

Schopenhauer's denial of free will has much in

common with the Byronic creed. It provided a basis for the coalescence of Buddhistic Pessimism and Romantic Pessimism. Schopenhauer indeed, like Byron, was convinced of predestination; he, too, was heir to Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. Even Oxenford had noted that Schopenhauer, despite his unorthodoxy, was "absolutely delighted with the Fathers and reformers when they bear witness to human degradation."

In the chapter "On Human Misery," in *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer bestows high praise on Leopardi:

"No one in modern times has treated this subject so thoroughly or exhaustively as Leopardi, who is filled and imbued with the wretchedness of human existence. No one moreover has depicted the utter absurdity and sorrow of our state, in such variety of form and expression, and with such wealth of imagery as Leopardi, so that he never produces tedium, but rather, continuous stimulation and entertainment "

Schopenhauer's admiration is comprehensible, though he and Leopardi arrived at their unqualified rejection of mankind's lot by very different routes, the cares of the robust and wealthy burgher of Frankfurt were less material than those which beset the impoverished Italian hunchback. Yet Leopardi did something to supplement Schopenhauer's influence in Germany. His verse seemed a rhythmical commentary on Schopenhauer's text. A first German translation had been published in 1837, even prior to the poet's death. Later, Paul Heyse compiled a more inspired German version. Heyse and Leopardi—here was a strange attraction of opposites! For Heyse, despite the bevy of potential suicides that haunt the pages of his novel, *Children of the Earth* (1873), was a jovial "Ja-sager," who bestowed a hearty, if unmetaphysical, approval on the universe. Quite recently,

Ludwig Wolde has produced an additional translation of certain selected pieces by Leopardi. After fifty years, Heyse's translation reached a third edition—an indication that the Italian's popularity in Germany has been fairly steady, but was never great. It can nowise be compared with Byron's.

The progression from Romantic to Buddhistic Pessimism, emerges clearly in the work of Richard Wagner. Ultimately however, Wagner fashioned himself a more positive *Weltanschauung*, mellowing Schopenhauer's sour philosophy by the addition of Christian charity. It would be difficult to conceive a more Byronic work than Wagner's early *Flying Dutchman*. Nietzsche rightly compared the sombre hero of this piece, with the French "ténébreux" of 1830. He is all too familiar, this mysterious stranger, labouring under a curse, fated to superhuman experience, whose salvation entails the suicide of his beloved. At the same time, our knowledge of Wagner's subsequent work tempts us to see in the manner of Senta's *Liebestod*, an adumbration of the master's later, mystical preference for night and death, at the expense of day and life.

It would be wrong to suppose that Wotan's reluctant progress towards an ideal of quietism and non-attachment in the *Ring*, and Tristan's nostalgia for death in *Tristan and Isolde*, are both concrete legacies of Schopenhauer. Chronology proves that Wagner's Buddhism was innate. He had completed the *Ring* before, in the autumn of 1854, thanks to the entreaties of his friend Herwegh, he first analysed the new philosophy. It is illuminating to discover that Wagner winced, on first probing Schopenhauer's uncompromising nihilism; unsweetened by music, the physic proved a bitter draught. But Herwegh stepped into the breach once more, and

persuaded Wagner that all great art was based on a realization of the fatuity of the phenomenal world. Then Wagner beheld the light:

"I gazed on my poem of the Nibelungen, and saw to my surprise that, in this poetic version, I had long been familiar with the self-same idea, I found so embarrassing in theory. Now, for the first time, I could understand my own Wotan."

From the day of this momentous revelation till his death, Wagner was never long separated from a copy of *The World as Will and Idea*. In December 1854, he wrote to Liszt that the book had come to him in his loneliness, "like a gift from Heaven," and avers it a disgrace that Schopenhauer should have been discovered by an English critic, while German professors turned their backs on him. He was so profoundly moved by this discovery of a kindred soul, that he even added a number of verses to Brunnhilde's prophetic monologues at the conclusion of the *Götterdämmerung*, which harmonize with the spirit of Schopenhauer's system. Later, however, he excluded them from his full score. Wagner also took the trouble to investigate Buddhist philosophy more closely, turning to Burnouff's *Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme*, and to the *Geschichte der Religion des Buddha* by Köppens. In so doing, he was merely keeping abreast with the age, since the Orient, in the guise of theosophy, was just commencing its peaceful penetration of the *salons* of London, Paris, and Berlin. In 1856, we find Wagner undertaking an entirely Buddhist opera, *The Victors*, amplified from a theme he discovered in Burnouff. It was to tell how a girl of low caste was accepted in a higher caste, after she had shown herself capable of renunciation in love. Wagner was particularly attracted to the subject, because of the opportunity it

gave him to hunt thematically in the music—i.e., through *Leitmotive*—at the two different castes. The work did not progress beyond a few preliminary sketches. These, like the fragmentary *Jesus of Nazareth*, were later incorporated in *Parsifal*.

If Wagner relinquished his technical interest in Buddhism, he never ceased to reverence Schopenhauer, nor to couch his admiration in superlatives. "I have but one hope for German culture, that the time may come when Schopenhauer will set the standard for our perception and thought." In view of this, it is surprising that much of Wagner's riper work deviates so considerably from the judgements of Schopenhauer. But Wagner was deficient in self-critical ability. It is ludicrous to find him, in 1852, speaking of the *Ring* as the product of a "world of Hellenic optimism," while exactly two years later, he claimed that it was saturated with a "Germanic, pessimistic view of things." But then, there was a feminine side to Wagner's nature which allowed him to resonate in sympathy with the most varied influences. Just prior to his discovery of Schopenhauer, we find him bubbling over with enthusiasm for the Persian Hafiz, who continued the tradition of Omar Khayyám. It is true, as Wagner expressly states, that a strain of melancholy underlies the casual sensuality of the oriental poet, but no one could accuse him of rejecting the fruits of life in the vein of Schopenhauer! Clearly, Wagner possessed a richer personality than the droll philosopher. He could appraise life as one who has himself sampled its dædal phases. In his ability to write great comedy, as well as great tragedy, we have the measure of his capacity to transcend the stultifying one-sidedness of Schopenhauer's system.

Wagner differs above all from the philosopher, in his

passionate adherence to an ideal of love and pity, and in his faith in the regeneration of mankind. His championship of romantic love is stated with the emphasis of genius in the *Liebestod* scene at the end of *Tristan*. He has altered the centre of gravity of the story, as compared with Gottfried von Strassburg's medieval epic, by making his hero and heroine voluntarily crave the salvation of death, which is to release them from the separation to which they are doomed in life. In Gottfried's story, Tristan and Isolde put up a stouter defence for their earthly happiness. Wagner's drama is full of that nostalgia for the night, as a symbol of "the eternal night," which Novalis had sung in his *Hymns*. Despite this preoccupation with the idea of death, the ultimate sentiment of *Tristan and Isolde* is too optimistic to have derived from Schopenhauer. Early critics were wont to refer to Wagner's masterpiece as a musical illustration of Schopenhauer's doctrines, but the philosopher himself would have been horrified at so frantic a misapplication of his message. H. S. Chamberlain has shown, in his monumental biography of Wagner, that when Tristan and Isolde surrender to their love-obsession, their behaviour does not at all accord with the denial of the individual will which Schopenhauer preached. In effect, Tristan cries, "Death, where is thy sting?"—but this gesture grants Death a higher significance than Schopenhauer would ever have allowed it. Wagner was himself aware how far he had drifted from his teacher, in the matter of Romantic love, and in 1858, while at work on the second act of *Tristan*, he even drafted a letter to Schopenhauer, in which he tried to clarify his own attitude towards the metaphysics of sex.

As *Tristan* presents the triumph of romantic love, so *Parsifal* presents the triumph of romantic pity. Schopen-

hauer held no brief for pity as a virtue, even if he did not attack it with the same acerbity as Nietzsche. Schopenhauer had pointed out that, since personal happiness could not be achieved, to "help" others, was to attempt the foolish task of multiplying a zero. Wagner, however, the great lover of dogs, children, and women, was not cast in so stern a mould. It is odd that Nietzsche should only have attacked these amiable weaknesses in his former friend, when *Parsifal* appeared. True, Wagner's cult of pity was here magnified into a mystical, Christian form that was anathema to Nietzsche, the unveiling of the Grail signals "the salvation of the Saviour" (presumably, Wagner meant the deliverance of Christ's original doctrine from the distortions to which it had been subjected by the Church). But Nietzsche might easily have discerned the same apotheosis of pity in much of Wagner's earlier work, e.g. in the compassion for animals displayed in the tale *A Parisian Tragedy* (*Ein Ende in Paris*), written in 1840, and in the theme of *The Fairies*, Wagner's first dramatic sketch.

In the last resort, the difference between Wagner and Schopenhauer is the fundamental one between historical and metaphysical pessimism. Metaphysical pessimism offers no loophole for optimism, it has no future to look forward to, since it does not recognize evolution as synonymous with progress. On the other hand, Wagner's historical pessimism allows the possibility of regeneration. He was convinced of the decadence of his own age. He ascribed many modern evils to the shortcomings of our money-system. At times he hinted darkly at the perverse influence of the Jews (cp. *Das Judentum in der Musik*, 1850). But, like Nietzsche, he believed that modern decadence was chiefly physiological. Probably influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach, he stressed the importance

of diet; it was Feuerbach who had coined the aphorism, *man ist, was man isst*. In his correspondence with Liszt, Wagner has left a strange indictment of his era. As often the tone is naively dogmatic. "Truly, all our politics, diplomacy, lustful ambition, frustration, and modern science, indeed all parasitic outgrowths of modern life, flourish upon a single soil—our ruined stomachs!" The theory is dispiriting; but, unlike Schopenhauer, Wagner did cherish the hope that the indigestion of his age might be cured, its currency rationalized, its Jews assimilated. Such a consummation, he thought, was the necessary prelude for the formation of a society ripe for his artistic ideal of *das reinmenschliche Drama*, or the drama of unadulterated humanity.

This is, in itself, a tenuous phrase; but it seems that Wagner intended to convey the Idea of Humanity, undisturbed by any of those religious or cosmological speculations which introduce problems alien to man's proper domain, and so may warp the natural evolution of this Idea. This trend of thought was likewise a relic of Wagner's enthusiasm for Feuerbach. The *Ring*, for all that it bristles with deities, is the prototype of the new drama. Though Wotan renounces the will to live, his creator flourishes a Hegelian antithesis. As he explained to Röckel: "This self-destructive will ultimately creates the fearless, ever-loving human being, Siegfried." Again we can imagine Schopenhauer's fury at such an optimistic perversion of his doctrine.

It is not strange that the teachings of Schopenhauer were rarely interpreted in art in all their pristine vigour. To create, while accepting the futility of Creation, was too much a paradox! Most of Schopenhauer's so-called disciples resembled Wagner, in that they interpreted the master in an amended, and generally emasculated

form. It takes a philosopher to understand a philosopher. Perhaps when Ferdinand Lassalle interpreted the system of Heraclitus, he was closer to Schopenhauer than Wagner ever was.

Schopenhauer's theory of the Will was launched anew, but in a spirit of cosmic affirmation, by Friedrich Nietzsche, when he wrote the rough drafts of his *Will to Power* (1884-8). This work, with its scintillating introductory analysis of European Nihilism, represents its author's desperate bid to cast off the shackles of his innate Byronism. It is the profoundest document produced by German pessimism; it was to have been followed by a companion volume on the history of loneliness. So many lesser Byronic figures posture knowingly, but are at a loss to account for the mechanism of their minds. How refreshing is it, to turn from them to Nietzsche, who not only knows that he postures, but tells us how and why! Though his superman may be a shoddy, and by now an antiquated figure, Nietzsche's high standing as a psychologist is unquestionable. So acute is his penetration, and so detailed his dissection of nihilism, that, by comparison, our own tripartite division of Byronism must appear egregiously simple.

Nietzsche received some direct stimulus from a perusal of Byron. Yet, his fund of learning was so extensive, that it would be absurd to assess this one influence very highly. There are many scattered references to Byron in Nietzsche's works which, nevertheless, betray a certain intimacy of footing. We find Byron grouped together with other problematical authors, such as Musset, Poe, Leopardi, Kleist, and Gogol. The English poet is praised for the insouciance which he managed to achieve during his stay in Venice, as contrasted with his earlier "sublime attitudes" and "splenetic rage." In his *Dawn of Day*,

Nietzsche speculates whether Byron's thirst for action was merely an endeavour to escape from himself, or whether it was of epileptic origin. In *Human, All too Human*, he sympathizes with Byron for the ill-treatment he suffered at the hands of his mother, and also quotes the "immortal lines"—

"Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life."

But the most remarkable tribute Nietzsche paid to Byron was, surely, the Overture he composed to *Manfred*—a drama of which he was wont to speak with bated breath: "Of all the dark abysses in this work, I found the counterpart in my own soul—at the age of thirteen (!) I was ripe for this book. Words fail me, I have only a look for those who dare to utter the name of *Faust* in the presence of *Manfred*. The Germans are incapable of conceiving anything sublime." In view of this unreserved eulogy, it is strange that Nietzsche left no fuller account of his impressions of Byron. The two men were certainly akin; *The Will to Power* was as valiant an expedition into dangerous territory, as Byron's Greek campaign.

In the Preface to his masterpiece, Nietzsche records the pathetic delusion that he has conquered his own nihilism, and tries to establish himself as a prophet "who looks back, when he tells what is to come." He asserts that he does not fear nihilism, since it is a normal accompaniment of evolution. Nihilism is, indeed, nothing but an organic revolution in values. To discard old values, as soon as they are outlived, is a biological virtue, and the Complete Nihilist thus approximates to the Perfect Man. At its worst, nihilism is merely a pathological transition—the awkward, but inevitable lacuna that may

separate the old society from the new. Nietzsche's theory of nihilism, is, however, equivocal, as it embraces active and passive forms. In its active form, nihilism may unleash destructive powers (Nietzsche's rationalization of sadism), in its passive form it tends to Buddhism and dilettantism. The most dangerous phase is reached when nihilism entails a flight from personality (*Entpersönlichung*), or a revolt against the supremacy of the "natural" lusts and instincts. The nihilist must strive to advance from nirvana to self-conscious power. Many men, though they rank high in the biological scale, will succumb in this struggle, "but he who survives," says Nietzsche, "will be as strong as the devil, just as in the days of the Renaissance." And he insists that decadence is not something to be destroyed in itself, it must be recognized as a phenomenon proper to all races and all ages. Like a snake's skin, it will slough in good time of its own accord.

Nietzsche propounded many causes for the nihilistic crisis of his own day. He held that the most important were the bankruptcy of Christianity, and the ominous growth of the masses. The lust for power of the herd-mentality was resulting in the vulgarization of culture, and the tyrannization of the exceptional by the mediocre. As a result, many exceptional individuals had lost faith in themselves and had become nihilists. Nietzsche regarded the emancipation of labour as one of the direst results of Christianity. Christianity was a false turning that had led man ever further from his proper path. Christian poets had castrated Nature. The Christian, Mrs. Beecher-Stowe, had unchained the inferior negro, just as that disguised Christian, Rousseau, had struck the fetters from the European domestic slave—Woman. He was convinced of the pathological origin

of Christianity. Where else, he asks, can one find such a mass of clinical material—unless it be in a Russian novel! He detested too, the dogma of the equality of Christian souls, for it ran criminally counter to Darwin's principle of natural selection. Yet, even if Christianity were a tissue of falsehoods, Nietzsche knew that it could not be disposed of in a day, that the period of transition would be long and fraught with danger. For one thing, he and all his contemporaries were the victims of heredity. Their ancestors had been vivisectioning their consciences for two thousand years; it would be difficult to break the habit.

Ultimately, however, this problem would solve itself, since men who persisted in passive nihilism would, by infallible biological laws, destroy themselves and their kind. The "*Schlechtweggekommenen*," or those badly handicapped in life's race, were bound to complete the work of nature by self-injury, and by provoking the ire of their betters. Ideas such as these presuppose a conception of the function of Will, departing widely from the theories of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche heaped scorn on his predecessor for reducing Will to the level of instinct, and promptly diagnosed this dethronement as a symptom of *weakness of will*! He believed that the Will, provided it was healthy and vigorous, acted as the lord of the instincts, now inciting, now restraining them, for the welfare of the entire personality.

If Nietzsche gave the Will a looser rein than Schopenhauer, he was not thereby advocating libertinage. Indeed, he was careful to point out that libertinage is antagonistic to the Will to Power. The truth is that Nietzsche condemned *two* types of passive nihilism. In addition to the Buddhist variety, he recognized a form of which the symptom was pseudo-passion. Thus, long

before Du Bos, Nietzsche explained certain aspects of Byronism as due to over-compensation for anæmia. He was convinced that the liking shown by the modern public for sensationalism ("*Erotica, Socialistica, Pathologica*")—for deserts, storms, orgies, and horrors—sprang from a jaded palate.

Nor could Nietzsche see eye to eye with Schopenhauer in the theory of art. He denied that the function of tragedy was to teach resignation. On the contrary, the reproduction of great and terrible events was the token of a superabundance of power. It was the duty of art to affirm, like Job.

The measures which Nietzsche advocates as preliminaries to entry into the state of active nihilism, are chiefly three: the adoptance of measures of social hygiene, which may facilitate the birth of the superman; the acquisition of Dionysiac Wisdom, and the transfer of certain elements of experience, such as pain, from the debit account of history to the credit account. It is scarcely worth-while at this date, to discuss the realistic basis of Nietzsche's theories of the superman, methods novel in his day, such as the sterilization of the unfit, have since become sober fact—though supermen, other than the pinchbeck dictator kind, seem as remote as ever.

From the standpoint of Byronism, more interest attaches to the question of Dionysiac Wisdom, which, in effect, is the apotheosis of sadism. Nietzsche held that Dionysiac Wisdom was latent in the spectacle of tragic conflict, the doom of the hero aroused this strange ecstasy to its highest pitch. By a kind of clairvoyance, the audience perceived that the sacrifice of one of the noblest of the age was necessary for the advent of a yet finer race. At bottom, then, the Dionysiac Wisdom is none other than the mystery of sacrifice, the death of the

tragic hero is a substitute for the immolation of the godhead. Nietzsche was obsessed by the idea of sacrifice. No doubt it was a symptom of that megalomania which finally overtook him, causing him to believe that he was himself a martyred deity. Lou Andreas-Salomé rightly interprets the Dionysiac cult as a subterranean outlet for the religious instinct Nietzsche had tried to stifle, and insists that he was god, priest, and sacrifice in one, since he sacrificed his "lower" self to the embryonic superman within him.

Nietzsche's gallant defence of pain forms one of the most fascinating arguments in *The Will to Power*. He probably borrowed the theory from Count Verri. In his *Sull' indole del piacere e del dolore* (1781), the Italian had asserted that pain was man's greatest incentive towards action and progress. Nietzsche amplified the idea with the help of some acute physiological observations. He noted, for instance, that to be tickled is, as a whole, pleasurable, though each separate irritation may appear disagreeable, pleasure is indeed, nothing save the interruption of pain! In this way Nietzsche found a justification for pain, and another golden opportunity to decry Schopenhauer, whose design for living was an elaborate avoidance of pain and discomfort. How absurd, in Nietzsche's view, to say that the amount of pain in the universe out-totals the amount of pleasure, and that therefore it were better not to exist! If pain and pleasure are inextricably intertwined in our psycho-physical perceptive apparatus, then all such gloomy arguments must fall to the ground—even if their mathematics could be proved correct! Nietzsche was thus in the fortunate position of being able to give vent to his instinct for intellectual masochism, with a clear conscience. Indeed, he never seems so happy, as when he is sitting on the

Tree of Knowledge, busily sawing off the branch on which he is perched. (Aldous Huxley has a taste for the same kind of acrobatics.)

Nietzsche often experienced a desolating loneliness; yet he was proud of the torture it induced, for, to be "a man without loneliness," was to declare oneself an underman. He was also a victim of those typical, Byronic outgrowths—the imaginary tentacles spreading from the ego, and lusting to embrace the whole universe of personality and experience. In *Joyful Wisdom*, there is a whimsically serious poem, in which Nietzsche defines this issue with unvarnished candour:

"Scharf und milde, grob und fein,
Vertraut und seltsam, schmutzig und rein,
Der Narren und Weisen Stell-dich-ein
Dies alles bin ich, will ich sein,
Taube zugleich, Schlange und Schwein. . . ."

Nietzsche knew that such enrichment of the ego might also spell its extinction, and he seems to have modified his desire accordingly; while it is expedient to take an occasional holiday from one's everyday self, the man of character, he affirms, will always return sooner or later to his "typical experience." In this way, Nietzsche strove heroically to canalize his Romantic *Unendlichkeitsdrang*, and to harness its disruptive forces within the limits of a single, socially feasible personality. The effort was vain, for, at the last, the Hydra of Totality reared its head once more in the form of the Theory of Eternal Recurrence.

This theory is at least as old as Pythagoras. It assumes, that beyond the solar year there exist far larger time-units, or cosmic years. Every event and every living organism would thus be thrown up again and again

on the shores of eternity, with the clockwork precision of the seasons. All mankind's joys and sorrows are cyclic. An essential feature of the belief is that the cosmic years, with their attaching manifestations, are *completely identical*. There is no place here for that hierarchy of incarnations, which allows a measure of optimism to adherents of the Buddhist system. On the contrary, Nietzsche insists that the endless repetition of phenomena is meaningless, and he dubs his theory "the most extreme form of nihilism." At the same time it is the "crisis" of nihilism, and will have varying effects on different kinds of men. The passive nihilist will feel himself yet more defeated, when he glimpses the unchanging future; but to the active nihilist, the terrible vision will prove a source of strength. Just as he is a "*Ja-sager*" to our present dispensation, so he will affirm its recurrence. Ernst Bertram, however, believes that the theory was elaborated by Nietzsche merely as a way of stressing his denial that he feared his *then* existence. Perhaps this was all that Zarathustra really meant when he mused, "I will come back, not for a new life, or a better life, but to the same life I am now leading."

Ever since he had transposed most normal values, Nietzsche was none too securely anchored in life, but the theory of Eternal Recurrence must have undermined his condition yet more. He tried, all in vain, to interpret the idea from a positive angle; for, to deny the uniqueness of each phase of human activity is to kill enthusiasm, and without enthusiasm the Dionysiac Man can no longer breathe. There is good evidence that however much Nietzsche sought to propagate his theory, he also feared and hated it. It is literally one of Zarathustra's nightmares. The last stages of Nietzsche's madness were the result of syphilitic infection, but it is probable that,

long before, his mind had begun to wilt before the cheerless visions of the future, it had itself conjured up. Shortly before his mind was finally over-clouded, an unearthly calm seized upon it; perhaps for the only occasion in his stormy career, Nietzsche knew *Heiterkeit*—"serenity." He has left a felicitous image of this false dawn, in the third of the *Dithyrambs of Dionysos* (1888):

"*Heiterkeit, guldene, komm!
du des Todes
heimlichster, süssester Vorgenuss!
Lief ich zu rasch meines Weges?
Jetzt erst, wo der Fuss müde ward,
holt dein Blick mich noch ein.
holt dein Glück mich noch ein*"

This lapse into a sentimental longing for death seems peculiarly inappropriate in a man who had spent his life challenging the validity of Buddhist quietism.¹ Only when one recalls his enthusiasm for Byron and Dostoevsky, and perceives how much pessimism is interwoven with his own doctrines, does the defeat seem less questionable. It is a defeat which outshines many a victory. Nietzsche at least bequeathed to his followers a message wherewith they might steel themselves. There are some who believe he was still sane when he signed himself "the Crucified."

As for the general fate of the Theory of Eternal Recurrence, Otto Weininger, an Austrian philosopher, and Kierkegaard, the Dane, both fell beneath its spell; it is perhaps relevant that Kierkegaard was an acute melancholiac, and that Weininger committed suicide at the age of twenty-three!

Chapter VI

THE BYRONIC NATURALISTS

Lilencron—Karl Bleibtreu—Richard Voss—W. Arent—J. H. Mackay—Przybyszewski—Hermann Conradi—O. J. Bierbaum—E. Strauss—Max Halbe—Walther Siegfried—Carl Hauptmann—Johannes Schlaf

DESPITE Nietzsche's astringent message, or perhaps because of it (for it has a strangely ambivalent complexion), there was no effective reduction in the volume of German Byronic literature during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. And though to grapple with material problems generally serves to oust neurotic sciamachy, the laudable scientific pursuits of many of the German Naturalists were equally powerless to stem a fresh wave of sentimentality.

Characteristically, Nietzsche could never make up his mind with regard to the Naturalists; he would praise them one moment and pillory them the next. There was little reason why he should be prejudiced in their favour, for he hated Nature in the raw. He believed that her only excuse for being, was to receive the shaping hand of man. As Professor Barker Fairley has shown, in Nietzsche—how differently from Goethe!—the organic principle was lacking. But Nietzsche's vacillation was, perhaps, due to the fact that the German Naturalists were such an ill-assorted crew. A bizarre legion of dons, dilettantes, and Bohemians flocked to the new

literary banner. The Bohemian element was strongest. The rank and file of the movement seem to have observed life from a garret-window—preferably in a *Hinterhaus*—or through a café smoke-screen. But what may have been an unfavourable atmosphere for objective studies of the social machine, proved an excellent breeding ground for Byronism.

The temperament of the German Naturalists was as the poles apart from that of their French masters. They were not writers who could record the effects of environment with prodigious industry and photographic accuracy. They achieved few works that approach the meticulous plenitude of Zola's masterpieces. They insisted, rightly, that the imagination, too, played an important rôle in society, and that its effects were accordingly worthy of detailed presentation; but, in giving this scope to the imagination, they often nullified their scientific pretensions. Further, the mania for producing complicated programmes and prefaces (one thinks of Holz and Schlaf), demonstrates the problematical attitude of the German authors. Despite the Teutonic slogan of "Consequent Naturalism," the French were more convincing in their artistic detachment. It is significant, too, that what German critics principally detected in Zola, was a new and superior brand of *Weltschmerz*. Bleibtreu, for instance, found in *Germinal* "a lofty *Weltschmerz* born of action, not of dull despair."

Though many of the Naturalists were quixotically Byronic, the majority knew little of Byron. Byron had been a potent influence in German letters for forty years, when Schopenhauer dimmed his reputation. Yet Nietzsche soon raised a new pæan for the Englishman, and three great Naturalists also became staunch admirers: Gerhart Hauptmann, Detlev von Liliencron, and Karl

Bleibtreu. It is odd that Liliencron and Bleibtreu proved amongst the most robust of all the Naturalists, although they had drunk more deeply of the Byronic fount than many of their more highly strung colleagues. Or is it *not* odd, but logical? Nietzsche's optimism, respecting the happy few who succeeded in transcending their nihilism, seems not unfounded.

Detlev von Liliencron was, in any case, a bundle of contradictions—at once officer and poet, a connoisseur of the palate and an advocate of the Spartan country life, a brave and dashing lover but a restive husband, who found it incumbent to dissolve two of his three marriages. This dualism is also apparent in his ancestry; the family's blue blood had been rejuvenated, when the poet's grandfather married one of his servants. Hence Liliencron's simultaneous endowment with sensibility, and a naive zest for living.

The handsome young officer of twenty-seven, who had been severely wounded in the Franco-Prussian War, soon became an object of sentimental interest to many a German squire's daughter. Liliencron, too, fell desperately in love with Helene von Bodenhausen. Her parents frowned upon the match, for the suitor, though socially desirable, was financially unsound. There was a forced parting. Thus thwarted, the young man's love reached fever-heat. He bombarded Helene with frantic missives, full of incoherent longing—and so discovered his Byronic vein. For two years, Liliencron now led a roving life. Like so many other members of his temperamental clan, he was driven far afield by his *dæmon*. On his return from Africa and America, he married Fräulein von Bodenhausen after all. The husband's debts, and incompatibility of character soon sundered the pair. Nor did the poet's union with Augusta Brandt last

longer than five years. But in his late partnership with Anna Micheel, he found relaxation from his tormenting emotionalism, sharing with her and their children a comfortable domesticity.

The record of Liliencron's convalescence from the trials of his youth, is fully set forth in his *Poggfred* (1896-1904). The sub-title, "A variegated Epic in twenty-nine Cantos," suggests comparison with *Don Juan*. The source is even thrust upon the reader, since Liliencron gives us a glimpse of Byron "handsome as Satan," in the august company of Dante. The tone of the piece, with its oscillation between the poignant and the flippant, is closely modelled on Byron. At times, profound disillusion seems to be the author's lot "Life has often given me the kiss of Judas", "the goal of all our earthly pilgrimage is—the Past"; "the earth is Heaven's torture-chamber." And there are many additional Byronic elements in *Poggfred*. "the anguish of love that's scorned", a hymn dedicated to Loneliness; the torments of "the vulture—Boredom." Liliencron even bewails the fate of a young girl, who received a fatal dagger-thrust intended for himself. In the lyrical interlude "On a Brigand Foray" (*Aus einem Raubzug*), he hints at a sadistic theory of love. Liliencron once admitted, in a letter, that there was "a touch of Platen-Lenau" in his composition. On several occasions he signed himself "Der Einsame."

As a soldier who had seen active service, and as a life-long follower of the chase, Liliencron had little need to sublimate his sadism in poetry. Nor did he often pose as a dandy, though his rejection of socialism as "*philisterhaft*," was due more to fastidiousness than to political theory. But his verse does display the Byronic motive of the Fallen Angel in a generalized form. If at times he

felt himself an outcast, so in the last resort, he, maintained, does everyone. Addiction to gall and wormwood is thus in Liliencron's case, not the result of some specific differentiation, but a trait he shares with the rest of mankind. "Each one of us is alone, even when he sits in the merriest company." In burdening the whole of humanity with this fatal suggestion, he gave a new twist to an old theme. Aldous Huxley, who has portrayed many post-War Byronic types, often echoes the same sentiment. At bottom it is the conviction of the incommunicability of human experience—of the ordained self-sufficiency of the individual.

There is a simplicity and a directness in Liliencron's elegiac mood, far surpassing that of the other German Byronic warblers. In his unaffected delight in Nature, Liliencron found a panacea for most of his woes. Something sturdily Saxon in his blood revolted against a cult of despair. He observes facetiously, in *Poggfred*, that he is "a virtuoso in decapitating the Hydra of Misery." Later in the epic, one can watch him meditating in the quiet of his own *Waldchen*, or steeling himself by exposure to the rude might of the North Sea. He can even laugh now at the sentimentalist who "broods like a churchyard owl in broad day." *Poggfred* is brought to a charming conclusion in the scene where the author is welcomed home by his little son. He thus has the distinction of being one of the few ex-Byronic men who afterwards sang the joys of family life.

Liliencron was an admirer of that more knowledgeable German Byron-fan, Karl Bleibtreu. He nevertheless deplored the crudeness of some of Bleibtreu's experiments in Naturalism. Liliencron and Bleibtreu lived in two very different worlds. Liliencron was a country gentleman who dabbled successfully in poetry, but

Bleibtreu was the professional man of letters, moving in circles which Liliencron generally gave a wide berth. Both men, however, displayed a vigorous approach to a bewildering variety of topics. Here, Bleibtreu was pre-eminent. He outshone all contemporaries in his astounding productivity. Something like a hundred and sixty published works flowed from his facile pen. He was at home in all *genres*, and also indulged in sociological studies.

Everywhere, Bleibtreu is forthright, and pounds away at his adversaries with an air of genial superiority. He is one of Nietzsche's more amiable children. But he will only rub shoulders with the most powerful of the earth, his especial favourites being Cromwell, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, and Byron. His interest in literature was only surpassed by his enthusiasm for military science, his knowledge of tactics would have shamed most generals. That so virile a personality should have succumbed to the lure of Byron—and Bleibtreu must be regarded as the leading, modern German Byron-critic—shows how many other aspects there are of the English poet, besides that of the sighing *Weltschmerzler*. For Bleibtreu had little patience with the more sombre complexion of his favourite's work, preferring his pistols, horses, boxing-gloves, and open-necked shirt. He was the apologist of *Byron the Superman*.

In its day (1897), the title of this book was no doubt deemed a daring novelty, though Bleibtreu was following up an easy clue. Nietzsche had selected Napoleon as a representative superman, thus Byron, "the Napoleon of Poetry," was also worthy a seat amongst the elect. It is amusing to find Bleibtreu (and Eugen Dühring too), upholding the thesis of Taine that Byron, as "a Germanic type," had written "Nordic world-poetry." Bleibtreu

even compares Byron favourably with Frederick the Great, insisting that Byron was just as great a gentleman, and lacked Frederick's "jagged edges." He was one of the first European critics to complain of a lack of true knowledge of Byron and his works—a complaint which he levelled at England, as well as his own country.

Bleibtreu gave his homage to Byron the most varied expression. In addition to the glowing chapter in his *History of English Literature*, his unstinting devotee devoted three dramas to incidents in Byron's career. The plays were, *Byron's Secret*, *Lord Byron's Last Love*, and *His Daughter*. Unfortunately, the author had little dramatic talent, so that these works do not make nearly such amusing reading as the novelized biography, *The Dream* (1880), wherein Bleibtreu's rather shapeless gusto had more scope. *His Daughter* has, however, a chronological distinction, since it was the very first German Naturalist drama, to probe the mysteries of heredity.

It would be surprising if we could not find in Bleibtreu's immense output of original work, tokens that he had perceived the grey and the black in Byron, as well as the white, particularly since bookish bulimia and truly ferocious industry of the type he displayed, are often the disguise of some intellectual malaise. Platen furnishes a parallel. Considered as a percentage of the whole, such tokens are few, but their trend is unmistakable. There is something of *Childe Harold* in the *Lyrical Diary* and the *Songs from the Tyrol* (1885), while in *World and Will* (1886), the influence of Schopenhauer is strong. The crudely erotic early novel, *Free Love*, terminates in the hero's suicide. In the three volumes of his *Megalomania*, which bore the blunt sub-title "a pathological novel," Bleibtreu investigated the unruly ambition which often seizes aspirants to literary fame. Remembering the

author's insatiable curiosity in respect of warfare, we may assume there is a touch of wish-fulfilment in the last chapter, where the Hungarian Count stops dabbling in letters, in order to rejoin his regiment. Incidentally, this conclusion is also Byronic in the most literal sense. Despite all these symptoms of unrest, Bleibtreu soon abandoned the dissection of individual anguish—only to succumb to a historical resignation. In *World Conflagration* (1912), he made gloomy prophecies of the revolt of the coloured peoples against the dominion of the whites. Bleibtreu possessed something of the seer-like quality of Oswald Spengler.

Thanks to the activities of Bleibtreu, Germany was once more Byronic-conscious. Thus Richard Voss, the dramatist and novelist, had to submit to the title of "the blond Byron." Like Nietzsche, Voss saw service in the Franco-Prussian War as a medical attendant. The horrors of warfare coloured the whole of his youth. With his sensibility thus sharpened, he refused to turn farmer, as his family wished; instead, he essayed to dull the splendour of the German sword with the lightnings of his pen. His revelations of the miseries of the front were not welcome in the ears of officialdom, so that his *Visions of a German Patriot* were banned. When still only twenty-three, he managed to publish his *Helena, from the Papers of a deceased Pessimist* (1874). These lamentations of a moribund suitor, rejected by a coquettish countess, can only be termed Byronicism in its most infantile form. The veneer of *Weltschmerz* masks a social tract—an attack upon the *blasé*, childless, modern representatives of German nobility. Voss condemns the "modern" technique of love, with its use of "artificial stimulants." Like many another Decadent, he is not averse from raising the unctuous voice of Rousseau.

Voss had few personal sorrows to bewail, apart from the unpleasant sights of 1870, which he speedily forgot. Since his gloom was sustained however, he was forced to accept the theory of hereditary *Weltschmerz*. When critics accused him of a pose, he answered: "Experience is not always essential . . . to fill a man with loathing for the wretchedness of existence. We may receive the seeds of *Weltschmerz* and misanthropy, just like those of consumption, in our mother's womb." Accordingly, Voss continued to defy his detractors in a series of pessimistic short stories. He gave them the strange but illuminating title, *Fragments, garnered by the Tired Man* (*Scherben. Gesammelt vom muden Manne*). One is reminded of Pückler-Muskau's *Semilasso*.

A happy marriage, and the growth of his fame as a writer of successful, if uninspired, historical dramas, led to a re-orientation of his views. And the development of sympathy with the halt and the lame in life, helped to cast out his own largely imaginary devils. Morbidity returned in old age however, overshadowing the novel *Sphinx* (1913). This work describes voyages in the Near East, undertaken by a man mourning the death of his wife, and it closes with his contemplated suicide. It is full of strange musings which show that Voss, reluctantly and joylessly, accepted some of Nietzsche's harrowing conclusions. Incidentally, he has some scathing things to say of our legal system, which punishes murder with an equal crime, and lets off scot-free "the murderers of the soul" He is compelled too, to recognize the Great Commandment: "Do evil upon earth, that ye may prosper"

There is little originality in Voss. Still more derivative is the agitated, yet pedestrian poetry of Wilhelm Arent. Arent was well versed in the literature of hectic despair

—from Reinhold Lenz to Rollinat's *Les Névroses*. In the collection *Metropolitan Miasma (Aus dem Grossstadtbrodem, 1891)*, he gives a dismal picture of the enervation to which he and his fellows had succumbed:

“*Matt schleicht die Zeit,
Und doch schlägt
fieberhaft erregt
Des siechen Jahrhunderts
Tiefkranker Puls' . .
Öd und bleiern
Gahnt uns das Nichts an . . .*” etc

He seeks “the subdued and blissful glow of nirvana” in the arms of the Three Women, to whom he devotes the latter sections of the work.

To regard neurosis as an emblem of superiority, is itself a symptom of the neurotic. A host of minor German writers of the period paraded their inefficient minds in this manner. Often, hypertrophied intellectuals felt drawn towards anarchism which, ever since Max Stirner's *The Individual and his Property* (1845), had counted a number of German adherents. One anarchist writer of distinction was the native of Greenock, John Henry Mackay, who had lived in Germany since his second year. His poems, which lack polish, are mainly melancholy reflections of Musset, Heine, Grabbe, Byron, and Annette von Droste-Hülshoff. More individual, if at times marred by their intentionally “plebeian” crudeness, are the *Songs of a Human Being* (1894), of Mackay's fellow-anarchist, Ludwig Scharf. But the most powerful of all the anarchist writers, was the Pole, Stanislaus Przybyszewski. His fame in Germany was meteoric, but short-lived.

The work of Przybyszewski shows clearly, how anar-

chism may be a substitute for sadism. Gordon, the hero of the novel *Satan's Children* (1897), is such an advanced thinker, that he finds Nietzsche tame! Indeed, since the idea of property still has a place in the philosopher's system, Przybyszewski dubs him "*bourgeois*." Gordon acts under orders from a central, international, revolutionary committee, but his inner motive is that of sheer, destructive lust. He is even contemptuous of anarchism, since it is attached to the idea of humanity. He despises affection in any form, because as long as he loves something, he cannot abandon himself whole-heartedly to his most imperious urge, that of universal annihilation. Gordon's inversion of values resembles de Sade more than Nietzsche, he avers that only those enter Paradise who during life were "Satan's children"! The tradition of evil, he believes, is older than the tradition of good, and consequently worthier of reverence. How seriously the reader is intended to take these doctrines is another matter. Even Gordon's chief accomplice sees in his leader's love of paradox, an effort to shield the innermost sanctum of his being from the gaze of the vulgar, and he hazards the guess that Gordon is perhaps "the last aristocrat."

Gordon consorts with the dregs of the underworld. These pitiable outcasts are nearly all neurasthenic. Indeed, they are little else but walking case-histories. They have none of the material background of ordinary human beings. They seem to live in rooms devoid of all furniture save glass and bottle. When not drinking cognac, they resort greedily to the samovar, they refill their cups about once every three pages, and once a chapter they find it a necessary item of personal hygiene, to cool their fevered brows against the window-pane! Their staccato conversations are liable to ejaculatory

upheavals. Przybyszewski has an irritating mannerism of making his characters say, "Ha ha ha!" and "He he he!" There are moments when the work borders on the kind of parody that Felix Dörmann made famous in his *Neurotica*. But for all that, it has moments of unusual power—e.g. the description in the last chapter of a ravening mob bent on an orgy of destruction.

If "knowledge is sorrow," as Byron maintained, then schools and universities are fit nurseries for Byronism. However, the earlier German Byronic writers produced few representatives with the strong academic bent of a Faust. They may have philosophized in an amateurish way, but one does not think of them as students in the technical sense. With the advent of the Naturalists, the Byronic Hero gravitated once more towards seats of learning. But, unlike Faust, he needed no supernatural solicitings, before he quitted the study for the street. The Naturalists lived with one foot in the lecture-room, and the other in their *Stammlokal*. But they were more diligent in frequenting the latter. Nevertheless, an academic ingredient is characteristic of German Naturalism, while it is generally lacking in its French and English counterparts.

Hermann Conradi, who died of consumption at the age of twenty-seven, and who was regarded as a martyr because some of his work fell foul of the censor, was the initiator of this new Byronic type. The title of his novel *Adam Mensch* (1889), suggests that Conradi wished to endow it with the widest allegorical significance; but he narrowed the field by conferring a doctorate on his hero. Dr. Adam Mensch is a true child of his age, "weary, weary unto death—yet capable of sudden enthusiasm." We watch the Doctor (D.Phil, not D.Med.), in pursuit of a number of tawdry sexual adventures—for, no book

of this kind was complete without a languishing specimen of the "chaste prostitute." *Dirnenpoesie* was all the rage. When expedient, Mensch quells his conscience with a few resounding Nietzschean phrases. Like Heinrich Spalding, the hero of Conradi's novel *Clap-trap* (*Phrasen*), he is given to moody introspection, but avoids its worst pitfalls. In the end he marries money. With his wife's fortune, he hopes to found a school on up-to-date lines, but he seems none too sure of the syllabus. The *dénouement* is inconclusive. "Yes! He would work. And if in the last resort that too was nothing but resignation, at least it held some hope for the future." Even the author appears mildly surprised that things have turned out so well for his hero.

The confessional note is more profound in the *Songs of a Sinner* (1887), with their motto *Vanitatum Vanitas!* The delights of illicit passion are here recorded with Bacchantic vigour, but there are also poems of penitent self-abasement. The last section, where the hero is supposed to be regenerate, does not convince. It must be regarded as a lame attempt to round off the book. Conradi never attained a state of equilibrium, and certain posthumous poems show that he meditated suicide.

During the Naturalist epoch, turbulent, adolescent youth was drawing attention to itself in the *Gymnasien* no less than in the universities. The diary of Otto Julius Bierbaum, privately printed in 1925, but written in 1881 when the author was only sixteen, is an unhappy mixture of Werther and the revolutionary Schiller. Though there is here much mention of "doubt" and "despair," *The Sorrows of Young Bierbaum* give no clear account of the source of the writer's martyrdom.

A generation later, Bierbaum gave a more objective

recital of his sufferings in the novel *Stilpe*. He had now learned to interlard his sentimental vein with the irony and humour of Sterne and Rabelais. Symbolically, the hero's father is a lepidopterist. As the sire chases butterflies, so young Stilpe chases the will-o'-the-wisps of poetry. The boy is gifted, but his teachers frown on his want of application; and his noisy companions plague him. Early dissipation and sexual initiation play their part, and Stilpe is soon in deep waters. He tries to found a *cénacle*, with all the Bohemian trappings. His career as a critic is too original to bring success. Next, he sponsors the *Literatur-Tingeltangel Momus*, a kind of literary variety-show, which was a contemporary importation from Paris. So he sinks lower, till one evening an old school-friend chances upon him as a drunken music-hall comedian. Stilpe earns a living by miming his own downfall! Despite himself, his friend is impressed by the performance, there is a touch of grandeur in this decay. But it is too late to help Stilpe, who one day hangs himself in earnest on the stage, and not merely as the climax of his act. *Stilpe* is at once grotesque and amusing. It is one of the few German novels of its epoch, that is still readable.

In the early 'nineties, the German Emperor inaugurated a conference to improve conditions in the schools. There was a feeling abroad that the curriculum needed modernizing, and that in the *Gymnasien* particularly, the boys were being over-intellectualized. Not much was done however, and in 1909 we find Professor Wilhelm Ostwald, in his pamphlet *Wider das Schulelend*, still condemning the unrealistic principles on which German education was based; like Hitler, Ostwald did not think it wise to overtax the adolescent brain. At the same time, a wave of suicides amongst senior pupils caused

consternation in the ranks of supporters of the old régime. Several novelists stressed the urgency of the problem, including Emil Strauss in his *Friend Hein* (1902)—a German euphemism for "Death"—and Hermann Hesse in *Under the Wheel* (1906). Some of these attack on the pedagogic system were at the same time *Kunstlerromane*, for the victims of pedagogic discipline were mostly lads of sensitive, artistic temperament. In *Friend Hein* for instance, Strauss draws a delicate portrait of a youthful musician whose inner anguish is only partly occasioned by the way he is misunderstood at school. The poetry of Holderlin has vouchsafed him visions of unearthly beauty; in his pubescent imagination, death assumes the guise of a supreme, intoxicating mystery. He cannot withstand its blandishment.

The popularity of the *Kunstlerroman* at the turn of the century—using *Kunstler* in its widest sense—was a symptom of the dangerous narcissism which had descended upon German authorship. *A Meteor* (1901), by Max Halbe, may serve as an example of the more ephemeral of these novels. Halbe's personal tragedy lay in his inability to repeat the success of his early drama *Youth* (1893). Similarly, Johst, the hero of *A Meteor*, and the supposed poet of "*Songs of a Lost Soul*," is perturbed because he cannot maintain his former creative standard. Musing on Johst's literary costiveness, a friend is obliged to dismiss him as a *Pubertatsgenie*. The poet gives way to despair, he feels he is "burnt out," and—a revealing trait—he shoots himself in front of a mirror! In later life Halbe cut away his Byronic locks, and was content to become a prosaic artisan of letters. His recent volumes of autobiography *Soil and Destiny* (1933) and *Turn of the Century* (1935), are marked by dignity and sobriety, though full of reminiscences of

the more strenuous days of Bierbaum and Hermann Bahr.

Walther Siegfried's *Tino Moralt* (1890), is a *Künstlerroman* of far greater intrinsic value. Though a long book, it is palatable; few authors of the 'nineties could match Siegfried's polished but colourful style. And though the theme is a sentimental one, it is told with a rare and refreshing restraint. Tino Moralt, a painter, cannot escape a sense of anæmia. All artists are androgynes; Moralt is endowed with the requisite feminine receptivity, but he lacks its complement, the masculine faculty of creation. The visions locked within him are rarely objectified. He is conscious of "a surfeit of inner riches," which he cannot turn to account. Thus denied an outlet, his emotions begin to seethe within him, and strain his brittle constitution to the breaking-point. A failure both in love and art, he becomes a kind of solitary, like Nietzsche, in the mountains. Wagner's *Liebestod*-music echoes in his ears, and just before escaping into madness, he re-reads *Werther*. Siegfried is a master of the pathetic fallacy, there are intimations in the landscape of the approach of Moralt's insidious disease. Indeed, Siegfried sometimes accomplishes as successfully in prose, what Lenau had achieved in verse. The author's valedictory to his hero betrays that re-orientation towards the problem of decadence, for which Nietzsche was responsible: "In art, as in every battle in life, there are heroes who dedicate themselves entirely to their mission, and succumb without reaching their intended goal."

By dwelling on its latent heroism, Siegfried brought a fresh dignity to an intrinsically morbid subject. This air of high endeavour is still more apparent in Carl Hauptmann's *Einhart the Smiler* (1907). Hauptmann

had received a scientific training as a biologist, but he was more concerned with the spiritual implications of matter, than with its visual forms. Hence the Biblical simplicity of his narrative, and the absence of any concession to that box-office interest which the background of the *atelier* had by now acquired. Even the interludes with the gypsies, to whom Einhart Selle feels himself drawn as a boy, and again as an old man, have a symbolic rather than a realistic value. The book is full of the *clichés* of its type: Einhart's disciplinary conflicts with his harsh father and unimaginative teachers, his idyll one Christmas Eve with a "chaste prostitute", his disillusion in love. But unlike most of his contemporaries, Carl Hauptmann dared to trace his hero's progress into old age, and even allowed Einhart to win fame. He, for one, had left decadence behind him when he penned the last lines of his novel. "When Einhart Selle lay in his coffin . . . he looked like one who gazes on life with a smile, from some lofty station on the captain's bridge . . . or like a pilot steering through deep waters. It was as if he had grown young again."

Carl Hauptmann, like Walther Siegfried, had made a valiant endeavour to curb the *Künstlerroman* of its exaggerated Bohemianism. Johannes Schlaf made a much more ambitious attempt to write *Finis* to the whole problem of decadence in his trilogy of novels *The Third Reich* (1900), *The Seekers* (1901), and *Peter Boje's Suit* (1902). Schlaf, like the brothers Hauptmann, had found the colourless objectivity of Consequent Naturalism distasteful, and so tried to sponsor a new mysticism. His mind had a strongly religious bias. In his *Criticism of Taine's Theory of Art* (1906), he attacked the Frenchman for neglecting the religious foundation of art, while four years later in *The Absolute Individual and the Culmination*

of *Religion*, a volume of intimidating bulk, he ventured the prophecy that art and religion, after their long and unnatural separation, would once more coalesce. Accordingly, he gave a warm welcome to the work of Maeterlinck and Verhaeren; but above all, Schlaf was a disciple of Nietzsche, and of an American who, decades before the author of *Beyond Good and Evil*, had urged the metamorphosis of human values—Walt Whitman. Schlaf fought shy of the term “superman”; he was content to remain the modest panegyrist of “the New Man.” Probably, he was inspired by Whitman’s “new, culminating man.”

In the first volume of his trilogy, *The Third Reich*, the hero still flounders in the morass of decadence. An inspired review in the Naturalist organ *Die Gesellschaft*, regards the book with complaisance as a document of historic worth: “A cultural epoch now lies in its death-throes.... In the form of neuroses and psychopathic states, the New Man is announcing his advent. He—the nostalgic type, Chopin-Przybyszewski—is able to feel and see things which do not exist for ordinary people.” Ushered thus pompously into being, the young student of philosophy, Dr. Emanuel Liesegang, cannot but disappoint. He is plainly a blood-brother of Dr. Adam Mensch. His contempt for tradition is only equalled by his passionate interest in the ultimate fruits of evolution —“the New Individual! The New Individuality! The New Man, and the New Woman!” He consorts with the inevitable harlot, and when she dies, he is filled with wonder for “this trollop who died without desire, without regret, without guilt, and who withal, was so astoundingly—chaste!” Her affecting demise, together with an overdose of Mombert’s ecstatic verse, prompt him to put a period to his own existence.

In *The Third Reich*, the birth of the New Man proved unavailing, though Schlaf compared Liesegang with Moses on Mount Nebo, gazing on the Promised Land. He even claimed that "to some degree he (Liesegang) is healthy, in a certain new sense." Here, as often, Schlaf is echoing Nietzsche, yet the value of the New Health seems questionable, so long as it is unaccompanied by the will to survive. The fascination exerted over Liesegang by the eerie music of Chopin, and by Przybyzowski's uncanny interpretation of that music (in his *Zur Psychologie des Individuums*, 1893), shows that his hysteria is retrospective, a relic of the most morbid elements of Romanticism, rather than a portent of the New Humanity.

The Seekers is a treatise on marriage, and a plea for the right of illicit, but sincere passion, to invade the sanctity of the home. No doubt, the "Seekers" of the title are the New Man and the New Woman in search of each other. When the doctor, Erhard Falke, abandons his wife for the biologically more enlightened Ilona, Schlaf bids his readers farewell, in the hope that the stage is now set for further evolutionary triumphs. We are even given to understand that, like Faust and Gretchen, the happy pair is to soar upward "towards higher spheres."

The last novel of the trilogy, *Peter Boje's Suit*, is chiefly remarkable for its Preface, which gives an account of Schlaf's theory of the novel. He recognizes two types of modern *Weltschmerzler*—a lyrical-emotional type, the scion of Romanticism, who languished in Germany till about 1875, and his successor from France, the "intellectual Epicurean" of Bourget. Schlaf complains that hitherto, German authors have not rendered this second, non-emotional type, sufficiently indigenous. He rejects

the work of Conrad and Bierbaum as too "one-sided," in much the same spirit as H. G. Wells might frown on effusions from Bloomsbury. And Przybyszewski is contemptuously dismissed as "a Pole." Taking a wide view of all the problems associated with Decadence, Schlaf thinks some progress may be made, if the new Byronic type is shown grappling with "philosophico-speculative, religious, and ethical questions." As a patriot moreover, he feels that here lies the key to moulding a solid, and specifically German, nostalgic type, less dependent on French models.

The earnestness, and even the appositeness of Schlaf's theories are self-evident. But it is difficult to enthuse over Peter Boje, as a shining exemplar of the New Man. Peter is both a scholar and a practical man. His Whitemania for a simple country girl is vicissitudinous, but, in the end, he does marry his Geesche. His private universe is now completely stabilized, and he leaves Europe expectantly for a newly founded colony in Arkansas. Schlaf tells us proudly that Peter will make a good colonist, for he has developed the versatility of "*ein smarter Yankee*"! Peter is no doubt an estimable youngster, yet, as a specimen of the New Man, at whose dire birth-pangs we have tremblingly assisted for close on a thousand pages, he scarcely fulfils our hopes. Has the mountain brought forth a mouse? Is the New Man not strangely old—very little different indeed from a successful commercial traveller? If this be so, then no progress has been made since the days of *Wilhelm Meister*. The message which Goethe endeavoured to inculcate, the worth of a *bourgeois* existence, to which commerce supplies the frame, is startlingly similar to that of Schlaf. We can find a meagre crumb of comfort in that Peter is at least packed off on adventure, somewhere "beyond

the Mexique Bay," while poor Wilhelm had to content himself with the exasperatingly true, though quietist doctrine, that "America lies *here*."

Schlaf realized, as well as his critics, that he was not yet out of the mire. Undaunted, he returned to the problem of Decadence in his novels *The Little Chap*, *The Prince*, and *Limbo* (*Am toten Punkt*). He tried ever anew to formulate a design for living which would bestow on man a heightened sensibility, consonant with physical efficiency. If Schlaf failed, it was because his talent was pedestrian, and because, in a sense, he had outstripped his age: the Byronic Man was enfeebled, but he was not yet on his death-bed.

Chapter VII

LA FEMME FATALE

Heinrich von Kleist—Tieck—Grillparzer—Hebbel—Wilhelm Meinhold—Leopold von Sacher-Masoch—Helene Bohlau—Sudermann—Gerhart Hauptmann—Frank Wedekind—Heinrich Mann—Hermann Stehr—Karl Schonherr—H. H. Luers

MEN, eternal revolutionaries, are more liable than women, to feel that divine discontent with their environment, which may manifest itself as Byronism. Few women writers are convincingly Byronic. The Betty Paolis of literature are mostly imitative. And when, rarely, an Emily Brontë topsyturifies our critical axioms, she remains an enigma, an exception to her sex.

The Byronic Woman, as a character in literature, is almost entirely a *male* creation. It is as if the Byronic Man, unable to found a harmonious relationship with women as they are, invents a companionable mistress, by projecting into her his favourite vices and whimsies. The nostalgia thus inherent in the creation of the Fatal Woman often emerges as an exotic allure. The Fatal Woman in her modern guise appeared relatively late in the history of European Decadence, at a time when the emotional anæmia underlying Byronic tantrums was becoming increasingly evident. The story of the Fatal Woman, from about 1860 onwards, was thus symptomatic of the widespread androgynism of the age, and sometimes even of a complete inversion of the normal

sexual relationship. For an instance—the desire to be subjected to compulsion, and even to torture, by a domineering woman, became the constantly reiterated theme of the Austro-Galician, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.

Though the Fatal Woman enjoyed a European reputation at the close of the nineteenth century, her prototypes can be traced to the dawn of history. However, figures culled from Bible stories and Greek legends, such as Judith, Delilah, Salome, Medea, and Clytemnestra, are too much incarnations of primitive blood-lust to be regarded as the true ancestors of the modern Fatal Woman, whose baleful powers are generally (but by no means always'), more subtly motivated. The romantic aura surrounding the name of Cleopatra, presages the modern type more clearly. In medieval German literature, Kriemhild has something of the superwoman, but the revenge she exacts is the stern expiation demanded by her age; her creed is not the viciously egocentric one we associate with Byronism. The later Middle Ages, with their superstitions of witchcraft, helped to foster a belief in the uncanny powers and the mysterious intuitions of womankind. At the same time, the stirring careers of the "viragos" of the Italian Renaissance, showed that woman could often rival man on his own realistic territory. These viragos were imported into Germany in the eighteenth century as the *Machtweiber* portrayed in the novels of Wilhelm Heinse. In the preceding century, Germany had boasted an autochthonous type, steeled to martial exploits by the rigours of the Thirty Years' War. Thus Grimms-hausen had told the adventures of the vagabond amazon "Courage," in his *Trutz Simplex*.

The Classical Age did little to heighten the stature of

the Fatal Woman in Germany. Goethe, no less than Schiller, liked woman to be sentimental rather than tempestuous, malleable rather than rebellious. Yet in his ballad, *Die Braut von Korinth*, Goethe provided an inspired setting for the legend of the female vampire; and in the figure of Adelheid in *Gotz von Berlichingen*, he revived the militant tradition of Lady Macbeth.

Abhorring all violence—even as manifest in natural cataclysms—Goethe loathed in particular, the “unnatural” violence of woman. Hence he turned in disgust from Kleist’s drama, *Penthesilea*. This play, completed by Heinrich von Kleist in 1807, tells the story of the Amazon Queen, Penthesilea, and of the strange outcome of her duel in battle with Achilles. It is one of the earliest European dramas of dual personality, Penthesilea is a woman as well as a warrior. Witkop indeed, believes that *Penthesilea* is a sermon on Plato’s theory of the Androgynes—an allegory of the tragic strife implicit in the division of the sexes.

By the irony of events, Penthesilea is compelled to do battle with Achilles, whom she loves. Chance wills that it seems she has conquered him, when in reality she has become his captive. She learns the truth of the matter, and then, the tenderness of the loving virgin is replaced by the fury of the Amazon. She pursues Achilles, shoots him down from a tree with an arrow, and finally helps her dogs to rend him limb from limb! She is possessed with a Mænad lust for carnage. “Loose all the hounds upon him! Goad the elephants toward him with flaming brands! Drive down upon him with your sickle-chariots, and mow away his robust limbs!” A venturesome American critic, Joseph Mersand, has suggested, against the authority of Krafft-Ebing, that Penthesilea is not a sadist. It is true that she can be

exculpated on grounds of dual personality, but there seems no question that Kleist was a sadist. He may have created in *Penthesilea* a figure whose self-dividedness has the stamp of lofty tragedy, but something barbaric in the Greek theme also appealed to his baser instincts. Greek drama is double-faced, it knows Electra as well as Iphigenia. When, in 1904, Hugo von Hofmannsthal chose to remodel the Electra-story, he found in it the same excuse for sadistic orgies that Kleist had discovered in *Penthesilea*.

Further evidence of Kleist's delight in grotesque horror, is furnished by the play he wrote immediately after *Penthesilea*—*Hermann's Battle*. In this drama, Ventidius, the Roman legate, falls in love with Thusnelda, the wife of the German chief Hermann. He steals a lock of her hair. This amuses Hermann, while, for little apparent reason, it outrages Thusnelda. She seeks a monstrous revenge by imprisoning Ventidius with a gigantic bear. During his death-struggle she mocks him by pretending that the bear is she herself, come to embrace him in love-surrender. By comparison, *Penthesilea* seems a foolish child, scarcely conscious of what she is doing, but the ruthless and despotic Thusnelda has the heartless assurance of manner, that was to become part of the stock-in-trade of the Fatal Woman of 1880.

It is not surprising that Kleist's *Penthesilea* met with a cold reception, since it appeared in an age when the less virtuous feminine emotions could only be tolerated in literature, if they were ascribed to supernatural forces. German Romantic literature is chock-full of mysterious female agencies, and dubious spirits of Nature. They mostly succeed in enticing some stalwart husband away from his wife and children. However, the doomed man disappears so effectively, that the reader is rarely

in a position to judge the character and purpose of the beautiful banshee. The commonest type of such Romantic witches is a siren, like Heine's "Lorelei," or Tieck's "Donauweib." In accordance with the philosophy of Schelling, Romantic authors frequently allow inanimate objects to take animated, female shape. The fair vision which lures away the hero of *The Runenberg*—written by Tieck in 1802—appears to be the Goddess of Metal. All these sprites are, necessarily, somewhat shadowy and bloodless. They helped to fashion the Fatal Woman's halo of mystery. Recently, Hanns Heinz Ewers has resurrected their weird tradition.

In Austria, at the end of the Romantic era, Franz Grillparzer restored the Fatal Woman to a creature of flesh-and-blood, even if he only portrayed her in his dramas with reticence. The earlier entries in the *Tagebucher* show that Grillparzer was yet another maladjusted adolescent who, in years even prior to Byron's rise to fame, suffered from an eminently Byronic malaise. Yet the sober restraint of his Neo-Classic models, prevented any approach to the more luxurious, and extravagant rites of the Fatal Woman. Grillparzer's innate Byronism revealed itself chiefly in his sense of being misplaced in the universe, and born beneath an unlucky star. His distress at being unable to find a bosom friend, is reminiscent of Platen. Again, his sudden plunge from the piety of childhood into the blackest scepticism, conforms exactly to the Byronic model. Like the boy Schiller Grillparzer thought priesthood the ideal profession, but the doubt thrown by a friend of his father on the immortality of the soul, resulted in "complete unbelief." Though his opinion underwent many subsequent modifications, Grillparzer always remained sceptical of metaphysics, which he once defined as "knowledge of the

unnatural " Like Goethe and Nietzsche, Grillparzer fell under the spell of *Manfred*. It was in the spirit of Byron's drama that, shortly after meeting Kathi Fröhlich, he wrote with vain exaggeration in his diary, "I loved her and I destroyed her."

Grillparzer's first drama of note, the Fate Tragedy, *The Ancestress*, was strongly influenced, like Heine's analogous works, by *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*. The hero, Jaromir, is one of many Romantic adaptations of the Noble Bandit. Grillparzer's rather timorous sketches of the Fatal Woman are to be found in later plays—*The Golden Fleece* (1821), *King Ottokar's Glory and Decline* (1823), and *The Jewess of Toledo*, which was twice revised after 1850. When chronologically arranged and compared, the heroines of these dramas—Medea, Kunigunde, and Rahel—indicate a slight, but undoubted intensification of Grillparzer's interest in the Fatal Woman. Medea is a more sympathetic figure than most of the later dæmonic women, because she strives to overcome the dark forces at work within her. The Fatal Woman of 1880 is largely static; Medea has a noble ideal of self-development

" *Klar sei der Mensch und einig mit der Welt.*"

Medea's final vengeance is gruesome, but hardly unprovoked. Here she differs from most of the later members of her clan, whose destructive lust comes purely from within, without requiring external impetus.

Kunigunde, the second wife of Ottokar, King of Bohemia, more nearly approaches the almost mechanical wantonness of this later, Anglo-French type of Fatal Woman. She heaps contumely on her husband for acknowledging himself the vassal of the Emperor Rudolf

of Hapsburg, even while she herself is intriguing with Ottokar's vassal, Zawisch. But the relations between Kunigunde and Zawisch are not clearly drawn. In the last scene, portraying Ottokar's death and Rudolf's triumph, Grillparzer has glossed over the intricacies of the erotic situation in a way which leaves the secrets of Kunigunde's heart unrevealed. Ottokar's downfall is certainly due in part to the doubts cast by his wife on his personal courage, but Kunigunde's belated contrition is not in keeping with the frigid sadism of the Fatal Woman, who is more apt to gloat than wail over her lover's passing! This general absence of contrition in the Fatal Woman shows that, far more than the Byronic Man, she has attained a negative ideal of impassivity, where she is proof against sentiment—against the repentance of Lucifer.

Rahel too, the Jewess who ensnares the weak Spanish king in her toils, though temperamentally more akin to the Fatal Woman than Medea and Kunigunde, is not allowed to triumph long. Like Medea, she becomes the victim of her own fatal gifts; unlike Medea, instead of shrinking from her dæmonic legacy, she revels with sadistic gusto in the consciousness of her power.

*"Die Hexen, sagt man, die zur Liebe zwingen,
Sie bohren Nadeln, so, in Wachsgebilde,
Und jeder Stich dringt bis zum Herzen ein,
Und hemmt und fordert wahrgeschaffenes Leben . . .
O gabe jeder dieser Stiche Blut,
Ich wollt' es trinken mit den durstigen Lippen
Und mich erfreun am Unheil, das ich schuf"*

Waublinger *redivivus*! Yet though passages like these show that Grillparzer was not unacquainted with the psyche of the Fatal Woman, his moral bias was too strong for him ever to grant her an unequivocal triumph.

He could not glorify her, as a true Decadent, in a spirit of art for art's sake.

The dramatic tradition of the Fatal Woman in Germany was continued by Friedrich Hebbel. His sketches, like Grillparzer's were only tentative. Hebbel, it is true, possessed in full measure that fusion of potent energy and potent imagination, necessary for the creation of characters larger than life. Moreover, there is sufficient evidence in the early *Diaries*, that he was obsessed by many of the more sinister Byronic themes. In July 1835, for instance, he entered the following gruesome notes:

"I have got an idea for a new short story: *The Man of Blood*. A man who lusts only for blood, murder, etc.

- 1 If he shakes hands with someone, he holds the hand tight, very tight
- 2 When he kissed a girl, he bit her
- 3 He slaughters all animals—
4. The way he gazes into a pail full of blood.
- 5 I'd like to murder myself, to see the blood."

But Hebbel's primitive, peasant instincts were ruthlessly suppressed by a fine intellect and an iron will.

In his *Judith* (1839), Hebbel adapted one of the germinal stories from which the tradition of the Fatal Woman has sprung, but the Judith thus dramatized, who decapitates her people's foe, is not the whole-hearted Amazon of the Jewish tale, but a complex creature of warring instincts, an anticipation of Ibsen. She slays Holofernes because his brutal courtship represents "an invasion of my humanity." The Fatal Woman is not given to weighing nice points of ethics in this manner. Her amoral code is more justly interpreted in a later version of the Judith-story, Georg Kaiser's *Die jüdische Witwe*

(1911). Here Kaiser, borrowing the mechanistic theories of his contemporary, Wedekind, has drawn a woman who is nothing but personified instinct—an erotic machine. She kills Holofernes out of hand, because she does not wish to surrender herself to this boor, while she hopes to find a more sophisticated lover in the Assyrian chief, Nebukadnezar. *He*, not unnaturally, takes to his heels! When Judith returns to her kinsfolk, they dedicate their liberator to virginity, a reward she had not bargained for. Nevertheless, Kaiser gives us to understand that the handsome young high priest takes compassion on Judith in the Holy of Holies, while the two are discreetly veiled from the sight of the praying multitudes outside. Kaiser has thus set out to “debunk” Hebbel’s heroine, of whose heroics he is deeply sceptical. He believes, rather, that the antagonism women may display towards men, is most often the result of conscienceless, emotional whims. The mature, and somewhat crabbed Hebbel, had little understanding for such guileless children of nature, despite a brief reappearance as the Kriemhild of his *Nibelungen-trilogy*, the Fatal Woman vanished from his intensely dialectical world, wherein she could not thrive.

During Hebbel’s lifetime, the Fatal Woman was chiefly popular in Germany as a witch, thanks, above all, to the chronicle-tales of Wilhelm Meinhold. His grisly heroines, deeply rooted in local traditions, evoked a more gratifying response than the later, exotic beauties imported from the French school. Meinhold was a country vicar, who lived mainly in the little Baltic Island of Usedom. He wrote his novels, *Maria Schweidler* (1843), and *Sidonia von Bork* (1847), in an archaic, sixteenth-century German. Previously, he had saturated himself with early accounts of witch-trials. The deception was

complete; most of his critics thought that Meinhold had merely edited contemporary documents, when, in reality, he himself, with a delicate sense of period, had supplied most of the graphic detail. So popular did these books become that they were both translated into English.⁶

Sidonia von Bork is truer to type as a specimen of the Fatal Woman, the earlier "amber witch" is relatively innocuous. In her youth, we are told, Sidonia was the most beautiful maiden of Pomerania. She attended the Duke's court, hoping to gain the love of one of the seven young princes. Such were her charms that the Duke, Ernst Ludwig von Wolgast, offered to marry her. But the princes of Pomerania, in conclave at Stettin, rejected the proposed alliance as unequal. The Duke was urged to pay court, instead, to the Princess Hedwig of Brunswick. Sidonia fled broken-hearted to the convent of Marienfließ, where she resorted to magic, to revenge herself on the royal Pomeranian line. After several misfortunes had overtaken his house, the reigning Duke tried the sorceress for witchcraft. She was beheaded and burnt at the stake in 1620.

The sinister quality of Meinhold's book at times approaches the grandiose-macabre, as when Sidonia dances a dance of triumph on the coffin of her victim in the church vaults, while, as solemn, but incongruous accompaniment, the chant of the funeral service comes echoing faintly from the stone walls above. This is the art of Poe achieved by far simpler means for, Meinhold's bald narrative style has rightly been compared with that of Defoe.

It was a stroke of genius on Meinhold's part to let the tale ostensibly be told by the sober "Dr. Theodorus Plonnius." This gentle scholar punctuates the story with

occasional sanctimonious platitudes:

"But respecting the illustrious and princely race of Pomerania, they perished each and all, without leaving behind one single inheritor of their names or possessions. Not, methinks, because of the spell which the demoniac sorceress had laid upon them, but because He loved this race so well that He withdrew them from this evil world before the dreadful strifes, wars, and calamities came upon them which our poor fatherland now endures."

By contrast with the pedestrian sentiment of the narrator, the suggestiveness of Sidonia's career is immeasurably heightened.

The chief impulse that went to the making of the Fatal Woman in modern literature, emanated from France, where, in 1845, Théophile Gautier's *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* delineated, once for all, the salient characteristics of the species. This Fatal Woman of the Romance imagination—she reappears in Flaubert and D'Annunzio—is a soulless aristocrat, who wantonly immolates her lovers. In England, Swinburne, Pater and Wilde sang her praises. Just like their French predecessors, they too invested her with a halo of mystery, by tracing in her features the androgyne countenance and the enigmatic smile of Leonardo's Gioconda. In Germany, Heinrich Mann almost alone has erected a literary monument to this type of fatal beauty.

The German Neo-Romanticists, though deeply indebted to French literature, had other fish to fry. The "George Circle," with its homosexual preferences, was heedless of exotic, feminine charm. Thus, a clear field was left to the Naturalists, who were deeply preoccupied with the problems of the New Woman. Inevitably, their conception of *la femme fatale* was very different from that of Gautier and Swinburne. They

detested any system—whether it was the idealism of Schiller, or the complacent prudery of “die Marlett”—which set woman on a pedestal. The Naturalists believed they were materially assisting the progress of Darwinism, by recognizing woman as the female of *homo sapiens*, and nothing more. Hence, the Fatal Woman of German literature for the most part loses the aura of aristocracy she enjoys in French, and English literature. German representatives are quite often met with in the ranks of the lower middle classes, and the proletariat. Theodor Fontane’s *Grete Minde* typifies this social re-orientation. More general reasons for this dethronement have already been discussed in connection with the Byronic Dandy.

Strangest, and most fervent champion of the Fatal Woman, was the Galician aristocrat, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. He did not merely propagate his theories in literature, but put them into personal practice. The victim of a cult of flagellation, Sacher-Masoch liked nothing better than physical maltreatment at the hands of his love-object. But physical castigation did not suffice. Any kind of self-abasement before a woman, became a source of keen delight. Once he drew up a solemn legal document, establishing himself, for a certain term, as lackey to his mistress, Fanny Pistor Bogdanoff. He later incorporated this experience in *Venus in Furs*. Above all, he cherished the idea that his mistress was deceiving him, and that her more favoured lover would chastise him in her presence! (One is reminded of the orgiastic suppression of jealousy amongst the early Christians.) Krafft-Ebing, observing these peculiarities, was moved to immortalize the Galician author, in the term “masochism.” Sacher-Masoch was furious, refusing to countenance the accusation that he

was guilty of flagrant, sexual perversion. He composed an elaborate defence, in part philosophical, in part racial. Its burden runs—these things are not perverse, but natural to the Slav world! This plea is supported by the investigations of Krauss on the South Slavs. And it is true, moreover, that Russian history is rich in female despots, such as Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter the Great. In his novel *A Female Sultan*, Sacher-Masoch was able to devote three volumes to a catalogue of her inhuman savagery!

As a Little Russian, Sacher-Masoch investigated the folk-lore of his race in the vernacular, but after he had studied at Prague, and lectured in history at Graz, German became his chief literary medium. His productivity is almost as astounding as Bleibtreu's, but a great deal of his work is mediocre. After notoriety had brought him success, he was too often content to rehash old works. Though volume upon volume flowed from his pen, he was not fertile in invention, he rarely escaped from the apron-strings of his Fatal Woman. His multifarious editorial duties also helped to curtail his activity as an original writer. He was responsible for several journals which aimed at establishing Naturalism in Germany on a richly cosmopolitan basis. He had no small opinion of his own services to the movement. In the editorial he wrote for the first issue of a new literary magazine, published at Budapest in 1880, he roundly declared. "The *Belletristische Blätter* are intended as a medium for that new attitude to letters represented in France by Zola, in America by Bret Harte, in Russia by Tourgenef, and in Germany by myself!" The *Belletristische Blätter* survived for a year, and then made way for the more ambitious "international review," *Auf der Höhe* (1881-5). This was modelled on the

Revue des Deux Mondes. It served as an introduction for the German public, to many little known Slavonic authors—Czech and Polish as well as Russian.

If Sacher-Masoch's aim was to provide his readers with "a colourful natural history of mankind," he gleaned more material from Goethe, Schopenhauer, Tourgenef, and his own soul, than from contemporary, scientific discovery. The most absorbing statement of his philosophy, is to be found in *Cain's Legacy* (1870), a lengthy collection of "Novellen," which includes *Don Juan of Colomea*, *Moonlight*, *Platonic Love*, and *Venus in Furs*, preceded by a prologue, *The Wanderer*.

The note of disillusion is clearly sounded in the prologue by implanting the erotic instinct in us, Nature makes us her blind tools; the seductiveness of woman only serves a system of meaningless procreation. Beauty is the means whereby woman sets her yoke upon man, bidding him slave for her and her children. Men and women are born enemies. There can be no harmony between them unless they resolve themselves into victors and vanquished. . . . (Similar theories, it will be recalled, inform Baudelaire's tragic view of love.) These sentiments are put in the mouth of the "Wanderer," member of a vagabond Russian sect which proscribes marriage, since it is an institution which only reinforces an evil inherent in Nature.

Sacher-Masoch does not preach revolt against the injustice of the cosmos. He is no Titan. Instead, he lapses into that mellow resignation to which the Slav is heir, and to which Schopenhauer's quietism seems fundamentally akin. Sometimes he even indulges in a wry-faced humour, as in the story of *Don Juan of Colomea* which, on its first appearance, caused a stir as far afield as America. In 1873, Sacher-Masoch modestly admitted

that this tale had produced the greatest sensation in letters since *Werther*, and conceded at the same time its "overwhelming originality." In its day, the plea here presented, that in judgements on sexual promiscuity a single code should serve for both sexes, was no doubt more daring than it would be deemed to-day. Sacher-Masoch also formulated a distinction between German and Slav ethics, claiming that woman is treated as a serf in Germany, whereas in Russia she may negotiate with man "like one monarch with another." Thus, the Don Juan of the tale agrees to connive at his wife's misconduct, since she is no more culpable than he.

The same comfortable, if spineless course is adopted by the hero of *The Old Soldier (Der Capitulant)*. A peasant-girl deserts him, a poor soldier, for the local squire, who can give her more luxurious gifts. The jilted lover condones her action with the query, "Would I serve a princeling if I might serve an emperor?" Sacher-Masoch affirms too, that since a woman is ruled by her heart and not like man by her intellect, she is less responsible for fickle conduct, and so deserving of special leniency. Nature is evil, and man, in so far as he is a part of Nature, is also evil, yet, while bent on pure intellectual endeavour, he transcends Nature. Woman is nearer to Nature than man is, and consequently more evil. It is man's duty, if he can, to raise this "cruel and voluptuous daughter of Cain" to his own intellectual level. That is the only way to achieve true harmony in marriage. The process of procreation will then no longer bring disillusionment in its train, but will approach Nietzsche's ideal conception of marriage, as the conscious striving of two people to produce something greater than their single selves. Sacher-Masoch believes that the day is still far off, when such unions will be the rule.

Two factors conspire to produce an atmosphere favourable to Sacher-Masoch's conception of cruel, despotic womanhood. His intimate acquaintance with the Galician peasantry had convinced him that, in humble spheres at least, Platonic theories of the affections are out-of-place. In primitive communities, the natural antagonism of the sexes is not masked, as it is by the hypocrisy of more advanced societies. Here, the partners in every union have to decide who is to be "hammer," who "anvil!" And since the Slav races are fertile in robust, mettlesome women, it is not invariably the male who emerges victor. In addition, Sacher-Masoch's biological pessimism taught him that woman saps the vitality of man, moulding his strength into new life. This theory could perhaps only appeal to one who himself came of effete stock. Possibly it was a further symptom of decadence, that Sacher-Masoch sometimes visualized the sexual tragedy as an exotic religious cult: woman was Isis, a stern and exacting goddess of Nature, and man—her priest, who must be prepared to sacrifice his own body at the command of the deity.

Despite their curious, inverted relationship to the opposite sex, Sacher-Masoch's pathetic heroes still conform in large measure to the Byronic type. They are victims of the same fundamental dissonance. In *Venus in Furs*, Severin tells Wanda "I have two ideals of womanhood. If I cannot realize my noble, sunny ideal, by finding a kindly, devoted woman to share my fate, then away with all lukewarm compromise! In that case I'd sooner become the slave of a woman who knows neither virtue, nor fidelity, nor mercy. She too embodies an ideal—a woman rich in glorious egotism." Thus wrong-headed quest for perfection, whereby the zealot strives for absolute vice, if he

cannot attain absolute virtue, is the creed of Lucifer renescent.

Sacher-Masoch's favourite type of hero is a misogynist, who has to be won over, first to reluctant, then to enthusiastic worship of some girl "with the soul of Nero in the body of Phryne." Generally, these misogynists have been jilted in their youth. Frequently they betray external Byronic characteristics—eccentricities of speech and dress. Herr von Meinhof, the hero of *Terka* (1894), is an orientalist akin to Puckler-Muskau. At the commencement of the story, he is living as a recluse on his country estate. Thrice victimized by women of rank, he yet surrounds himself with a whole picture-gallery of beautiful, but despotic womanhood. Van Dyck's Delilah, delivering her lover to his foes; the Bohemian Amazon, Scharka, capturing Ztierad in a forest near Prague, Clytemnestra throwing the net over Agamemnon, Catherine II of Russia surveying through a lorgnette, the rebel Pugatschev imprisoned in a cage, Christina of Sweden watching the murder of her former favourite, Monaldeschi. . . . Already previously impressed by the efficient manner in which Terka, the daughter of the village schoolmaster, canes her pupils, Meinhof realizes that his heart is definitely lost, yet a fourth time, when he observes the neat way in which she despatches chickens! (One wonders whether this may not be a deliberate parody of the celebrated incident in *Werther*, where Lotte cuts bread and butter!) We are left to infer that, under Meinhof's eager tuition, Terka will graduate to nobler work of execution.

Terka, like most of Sacher-Masoch's heroines, is ugly. Her creator believes, indeed, that cruelty in woman is in part the seeking of compensation for some personal deficiency—again a piece of Byronic mechanism. As

a sex too, women are more cruel than men, because, unlike men, they cannot generally satisfy their ruthless ambition, amid the hurly-burly of professional competition. But, in his *Seamy Side of Society* (*Soziale Schattenbilder*), Sacher-Masoch bethought himself of an ingenious exception—the lady-detective who can employ her charms on hapless criminals with a clear conscience, and finally deliver them to the retribution of justice. As a rule, however, woman can only unmask her will to power in the form of coquetry; if her ambition is initially large, or if it is goaded by some special circumstance, such as ugliness, her coquetry may develop into a refined cruelty. In the first of the essays *From the Diary of a Man of the World* (1870), Sacher-Masoch claims that the immoderate coquetry of woman has caused as much blood to flow, as the truculent Cæsarism of the male world.

However ill-featured they may be, Sacher-Masoch's heroines generally display an expensive taste in furs, though his peasant-women are mostly content with rabbit-skin. Sacher-Masoch explained his fur-fetish by a theory of electrical stimulation, but it seems more likely that he beheld in a fur-draped female figure, a symbol of woman's capacity to exploit the weak.

Sacher-Masoch's *succès de scandale* was immense. But it shed so lurid a light on the crasser vices of the Fatal Woman, that the pitch was most effectively queered for other writers. Many of the Naturalists waited for the hue and cry to abate before they ventured their hand at delineating the dæmonic, feminine personality. A number of women writers endeavoured to make the Fatal Woman respectable by regarding her as an instrument of emancipation. Her sadistic lust was re-interpreted as the righteous revenge wreaked by Woman

on her eternal oppressor and exploiter—Man. Maria Janitschek initiated this process of just execution, and the tradition was upheld by Helene Bohlau in her novel *Halbtier* (1899). This "half-animal," the heroine Isolde Frey, symbolizes woman striving to raise her lot from that of the creature to man's sensual needs, to that of his intellectual equal. The hero, no admirer evidently of Sacher-Masoch, thwarts rather than assists her—and is shot for his pains! The new type of Amazon represented by Isolde Frey, was an improvement on the old, but she thoroughly confounded the issue of the Fatal Woman. There is good evidence that, in the 'nineties, German authors were unable to decide what was ethical and what was non-ethical in the Fatal Woman's composition. Was she a timeless, and amoral æsthetic phenomenon, or was she the authentic precursor of the New Woman? Some writers confused the two and produced a hybrid, a Fatal Woman who was neither as grandiose nor as ruthless as her French sister, but who also failed to convince as the mouthpiece of emancipation.

Magda, the heroine of Hermann Sudermann's *Home* (1893), is one such hybrid. Her behaviour is marked by that over-elaborate ease, we expect from one whose background is the theatre, but we are pained when this creature of elastic morals prates of the dignity of modern womanhood. In any case, Sudermann is never too happy in the drama of ideas. He is resourceful in achieving the stage illusion of life, his own comments on the scene are disappointing. It was thus far more within his scope to present the old type of Fatal Woman than the new. He drew one such conscienceless vampire in Adah Barczinowski, whose spell bewitches the *parvenu* world in *The End of Sodom* (1890).

It was not till 1898, in his *Johannis*, that Sudermann

tried to compete with the English and French Decadents on their own ground. The heroine of the piece is Salome, and the story, a simple adaptation from the Bible. In this it resembles Flaubert's short story *Hérodias*, and Wilde's *Salomé*. A comparison of the three works is illuminating. In *Hérodias*, Salome is a soulless, and almost brainless erotic mechanism, like Swinburne's Faustine. Her own feelings are not involved in the doom of the Baptist; Salome petitions the Tetrarch solely on her mother's behalf; so disinterested is she, that she even forgets the name of the intended victim! Wilde, on the other hand, seized upon the chance for a more effective motivation: Salome loves Jokanaan, and, all her seductions failing, she sacrifices his life to her desire.

As regards plot and characterization, Sudermann's *Johannis* stands midway between Flaubert and Wilde. His Salome also loves the Baptist, and her inner nature is the usual farrago of sadism and masochism. But Sudermann does not pursue the theme with Wilde's fine consistency. Where Wilde's Salome begs the Tetrarch for John's head on her own initiative, in Sudermann's play, Salome is once more her mother's tool; yet she is not as abject a figure as in Flaubert's *conte*. Her mother's request harmonizes with her own secret desire. On the whole, Sudermann's heroine resembles the orthodox Fatal Woman of Swinburne; but his play lacks the awful concision of Wilde's drama. He was hampered in his exposition of the love-story, by his major weakness of "nibbling at the problematical." *Johannis* essays to be more than an account of an abnormal passion; it pretends to throw light on the soul of John the Prophet, who is torn with doubt as to the doctrine and identity of the very Messiah he heralds. Sudermann has not succeeded in fusing this motif with the tale of

Salome's love. Nor, despite some imposing, scattered rhetoric, has he matched the poetry of Flaubert and Wilde.

A writer whose early work betrayed a distinct Byronic flavour, but who has since travelled the royal road to Weimarserenity, is the *doyen* of German authors—Gerhart Hauptmann. Hauptmann, with his universal sympathies, envisages woman as a various being. His own ideal is perhaps the self-sacrificing *Otto*gebe, in his *Poor Heinrich* (1902), but already in his *Before Dawn*, he proved his ability to draw a monster of lasciviousness, such as Krause's second wife. And in *Carter Henschel* (1898), he produced a full-length portrait of a Fatal Woman of the lower middle classes.

In his first published work, *The Promethean's Fate* (*Promethudenlos*, 1885), Gerhart Hauptmann had, like Liliencron, attempted a Byronic epic. But whereas Liliencron took *Don Juan* for his model, Hauptmann, probably inspired by Bleibtreu, laboured unsuccessfully to capture the spirit of *Childe Harold*. The hero, Selim, is of an Ossianic disposition, but he forgets his own woes when forced into contact with Italian poverty. Hauptmann speedily withdrew his book from the market, rightly regarding it as immature. It deserves closer attention as a testimony to the awakening of the author's social conscience, than for its trite Byronism. The concluding scene, where Selim throws his lyre into the sea, perhaps conveys Hauptmann's conviction that poetry is ineffective as an instrument of humanitarian reform.

Though Hauptmann rejected Byronism in its specific, subjective form, he continued to keep a steadfast watch on human depravity. His earlier work contains a whole gallery of Fatal Women. The powerful short story *Signalman Thiel* (1887), anticipates the creation of

Hanne Schäl; for, Thiel's second wife is a virago like Hanne, who maltreats her daughter. The unfinished *Elga* of 1896, half ballad, half drama, is based on Grillparzer's tale *The Monastery near Sendomir*, so that the seminal importance of Grillparzer's sketches of the Fatal Woman seems clear. Hauptmann's conclusion is a gloomy one: "Let no one found his happiness on his wife and child."

It has been asserted that Hauptmann is a more amoral writer than Nietzsche. Thus *Carter Henschel* is saturated with the fatalism of *Before Dawn*, and displays an even greater moral indifferentism. Henschel always seems to act contrary to his better knowledge. The audience sees how the man is turned from adamant to clay through the dæmonic assertion of Hanne Schäl. Hanne is the lusty young peasant woman who becomes the carter's second wife. Her destructive genius is shown not directly, but in the slow disintegration of her husband's self-confidence. Hauptmann is chary of any effusive display of Hanne's power. At the commencement of the drama, Henschel is respected as a successful and sagacious man. With fine irony, Hauptmann even makes him address a few encouraging words to Hanne, when she is despondent. But soon the boot is on the other foot. Henschel feels he has sinned in marrying his first wife's maid; as his wife lay dying, he had promised her not to undertake this very step. Now, evil rumours reach his ears concerning Hanne's flirtations. Riven with doubt, he commits suicide. It is odd how little Henschel associates his downfall with its apparent engineer. He puts all the blame on himself. Hanne's distress, when she learns of her husband's death, leaves the critic with a problem—for, no token of repentance had escaped her earlier. In Hanne, the destructive itch is perhaps

partly subconscious; her conscious contrition is as unexpected as that of Grillparzer's Kunigunde.

The supreme exponent of the proletarian Fatal Woman in German literature, is Frank Wedekind. His work is more primitive, more agitated even, than that of Sacher-Masoch. He has some points of contact with Przybyszewski, though he is easily the Pole's superior in execution. Wedekind came of unusual stock, partly German, partly Jewish. Possibilities of genius and of madness were latent on the Jewish side, for his grandfather had died in an asylum after inventing phosphorus matches. Wedekind's own career was full of incident. It was only after he had been an advertising agent, and led a roving life with a circus that he turned to literature. Though friendly with several Naturalist authors, he spurned their technique, preferring subtle, Impressionist methods to their over-elaboration. Yet he displayed a candour in dealing with sexual problems that shocked even some thorough-going Naturalists, and drew the wrath of the censor on his head.

Like Sacher-Masoch, Wedekind protested vigorously against imputations of satanism and cynicism. He claimed that he discussed the ethics of prostitution in the spirit of a social reformer, and that a drama like *Death and the Devil* (1905), in which the chief character is a procurer, proves the healthy moral that "a cynic is necessarily defeated by his own cynicism."

A favourite word with Wedekind is *Trieb*—primitive instinct. Most of his characters are indeed personifications of the more elementary desires, such as the love-instinct, the acquisitive instinct, the instinct of self-preservation. Such a vision of life entails the neglect of niceties and refinements, and facilitates an immense simplification in the idea of the social fabric. Wedekind's plays are

pregnant kaleidoscopes, where men and women ricochet off each other with the same barbaric urgency that activates Grabbe's puppets. But if Wedekind sees in instinct the prime fount of human behaviour, he does not therefore identify instinct with hedonism. Indeed, he feels compassion for the many who are the victims of their instincts. The insatiable desire of Lisiska, the prostitute in *Death and the Devil*, is really an itch for self-destruction. However many murders they perform, Wedekind's Fatal Women are not exultant egoists, dwelling in some superhuman clime, but rather, pitiable martyrs to lusts over which they have lost control.

Thus, the conduct of Delila, in the dramatic poem *Samson* (1913), is determined by jealousy. She blinds Samson so that he may not gaze at other women! In this drama only did Wedekind condescend to refashion a hackneyed literary theme. As a rule, his hatred of stylized literature made him select his characters from the very dregs of society. Lulu, the prostitute in *Spirit of the Earth* (1897), and of its continuation, *Pandora's Box*, represents, in extreme form, that type of Fatal Woman whom Praz compares with the praying mantis. Yet Lulu invokes her own, as well as her lover's doom. In *Spirit of the Earth*, it is true, she is still triumphant; three of her husbands have been killed for her sake, and in the last act, Lulu commences the seduction of her stepson, whose father she has just shot! There is sometimes more than a touch of bathos in Wedekind's work. In *Pandora's Box*, Lulu is herself murdered, in appropriately sordid fashion, by Jack the Ripper. Alwa Schön, the stepson, is the mouthpiece of Wedekind's nihilistic philosophy of sex. In drawing his Fatal Woman, Wedekind tapped native sources of pessimism, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, rather than the French Decadents.

The suggestion of bathos that creeps into Wedekind's dramas is probably akin to the touches of irony in Heine and Waiblinger, and as with these latter, it is a symptom of convalescence. In later years, Wedekind did not conceal his disgust at the Fatal Woman's sadistic code. The renunciation is plainly apparent in *Franziska* (1911), wherein a "superwoman," eager to taste the joys of male assertiveness, is granted the privilege of changing her sex for two years; disillusioned, she finally attains domestic happiness as a simple village housewife!

Heinrich Mann, almost alone of German authors in this field, has turned his back on the slums, and briefly restored the Byronic superwoman to high worldly rank. The heroine of the trilogy *The Goddesses, or the three Novels of the Duchess of Assy* (1902-3), is an Italian Duchess of Viking descent. The three goddesses who successively dominate her life are Diana, Minerva, and Venus. From being a blue-stocking with a hankering for revolution, the Duchess turns first to art, and finally to debauchery. As her life progresses, she quenches her past ideals ever more resolutely, so that the animal lust of her last years stands in Byronic polarity with the hopes of her youth.

The commingling of the sophisticated and the primitive in the book perhaps owes something to its author's mixed blood (German, and Portuguese), but the influence of D'Annunzio is unmistakable. Like so many fatal women, the Violante von Assy of the Third Book is intended to be symbolic of her whole sex. Her own inner variousness, rather than sheer perversion, is the cause of her promiscuity, her complex personality is mirrored in the motley throng of lovers who attend her. One of these, Jean Guignol, is cruelly aware of his personal insufficiency:

"I might as well go hang myself, since I am no Don Juan and no Rienzo, no work of art and no great artist, no Jesus, no sweet child, no decrepit clown, no Heliogabalus, no Puck. . . For you have need of all of these!"

The ever-changing pageant of love, in which she is the central figure, justifies Guignol's curious request that the Duchess shall look in a mirror and "count herself." Byronic anæmia has here assumed the same hectic disguise as with Lenau's Faust, and, as with the latter, the Duchess of Assy's frenzied activity conceals "*Selnsucht nach dem Untergange*."

Mann's heroine abandons herself ever more voluptuously to an aimless *Tribleben*, untroubled by cosmic speculation. The Fatal Woman differs notably from the Byronic Man in this absence of intellectual masochism, but, like her male counterpart, she is frighteningly alone. A whole gallery of lovers cannot remove her sense of isolation. Her passage through Europe is punctuated by a succession of suicides, they leave her indifferent, for she would rather turn her sadism against herself, than against others, she rejects one lover, Don Saverio, on the ground that he is incapable of becoming her murderer! Having shaped life into a flamboyant masque, in the midst of which she loved to attitudinize, the Duchess dies unregenerate, and still unsated. It would seem that the Fatal Woman may be something of a sadist and a dandy, but that her less questioning acceptance of life, and barrenness in speculation, prevent her from rising to the status of the more conscientious male—that of the Fallen Angel.

The absence in the Fatal Woman of that cosmic doubt which had beset the Byronic Man, restricted her sphere of activity, so that even before the advent of the Freudian

theorists she had become the agent in a drama wherein sex was the chief motivating force the problems of the Dæmonic Woman became identified with the phenomena of nymphomania! This betokened as great a loss in her literary stature, as Grabbe's crude realism had done for the Byronic Man. The more the mystical element in the Dæmonic Woman dwindled, the more the influence of Freud grew visible.

In Hermann Stehr's novel *Nathanael Maechler* (1929), the author still allows his pen to be guided by the tradition of an older school. Stehr frequently calls his heroine, Paula Grossmann, "dæmonic." Paula has been deserted by Maechler. Without stirring from her hut in the mountains she uses her peculiar powers to destroy Maechler's domestic happiness his first-born is fey, and when Maechler confesses his affair with Paula to his wife, she dies Stehr has refurbished the hoary theme of the vampire. A Silesian, and accordingly heir to a lengthy tradition of mysticism, he is content to drift in the irrational currents of emotion and passion. His exposition of sexual problems is still humbly done, with a consciousness of ultimate enigmas.

Very different is the treatment meted out by Karl Schonherr, in his drama *The Devil Woman* (*Der Weibsteufel*). In Schonherr, the materialism native to the Tyrolese, has been accentuated by long residence in the Vienna of the Freudian schools. The fatal influence of woman expounded in his drama, has a purely sexual basis. There are only three characters in the play—the Man, his Wife, and the Ranger—of whom the first is impotent, and the second enamoured of the third. With such cunning does the wife inflame the stolid ranger, that he is led to murder her ailing husband. The potential murderer is reduced to the state of a

somnambulist by the seductiveness of his mistress, but there is little mystery in her methods! In Schonherr's drama, the earlier, mystical type of Fatal Woman has been displaced by an equally fatal, but more tangible specimen of her sex, whose actions are predetermined by the dogmas of the modern psychology.

In Hanns Heinz Ewers, the German Poe, the Fatal Woman possesses a modern champion who has steadfastly adhered to her weirder properties. Yet, his naive delight in the grisly and gruesome is tempered by the scientific inquisitiveness of the anthropologist. He is not a mere sensation-monger, but something of a scholar who, in addition, has an eye to purely "literary" effects. In defence of Ewers as a writer worthy of critical investigation, it may be mentioned that in 1922 he wrote a conclusion to Schiller's story *The Visionary* (*Der Geisterseher*), we could not imagine Edgar Wallace completing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*!

An indefatigable traveller, Ewers likes to describe unusual scenes and unusual people. In his *Alraune, the Story of a living Being* (1911), he has associated the life-story of a Fatal Woman with the uncanny legend of the mandrake. A celebrated gynæcologist, Dr. ten Brinken, translates the legend into reality, by artificially impregnating a prostitute with the semen of a newly executed murderer! A girl, Alraune, is born, and Dr. ten Brinken adopts her. She grows up as a reckless creature who can voluntarily unharness malignant forces, whilst herself immune against their effects. She eggs on her chauffeur to drive at perilous speed, but when the car crashes, and the chauffeur is killed, she does not even receive a scratch. Two of her admirers fight a duel, and one dies. Another lover becomes the victim of consumption. Finally, Frank Braun, the hero of several of Ewers'

novels, and the original inventor of the macabre scheme that led to Alraune's birth, returns after years of travel, and falls in love with his creation. But the love of these two beings becomes strangely mingled with hate. Braun too, is the possessor of supernatural powers which, unknown to his conscious mind, are leagued against Alraune. Once, a stray shot from her rifle grazes Braun just above the heart, without however injuring him. Then Alraune knows that her spell is broken. Sleep-walking, she falls from the roof, but, even in her own death, drags another woman to her doom.

Frank Braun reappears in *Vampire* (1920), wherein not vampirism alone, but all the associated blood-lusts are learnedly analysed. Ewers traces the origin of the cult to an astral myth: the Babylonians believed that at sunset Labartu, the star-goddess, tore the sun-child to pieces and ate it. But Frank Braun, stripping all blood-cults of their legendary trappings, discloses not a primitive religion, but a pathological state. Even the Great War, he asserts, is the result of an obscure, but highly contagious South Sea disease, which arouses cannibal instincts in human beings! Such theories may provoke a smile. Yet, here as always, some substratum of truth may underlie Ewers' apparently lurid phantasy, for, it would be equally difficult to prove or disprove the pathological nature of war . . . But, for our present theme, it is more germane to observe how strongly the Byronic life-rhythm—the alternation of periods of lassitude with fits of excitability—still emerges in Ewers' description of a modern vampire. . . .

Penthesilea, Sidonia von Bork, Sacher-Masoch's Wanda and Terka, the Duchess of Assy, Wedekind's Lulu, and Ewers' Alraune—these are the several types of

the German Fatal Woman When one takes stock of her history in the past fifty years, some conclusions are inescapable. Despite Meinhold and Heinrich Mann, she never developed into a clearly defined, æsthetic type, as she did in France and England. Nor did she help to fructify such great literature; she was never accepted in poetry as she was in the drama and the novel. These facts are probably interdependent. German opinion on feminism, during the 'eighties and 'nineties, was too various to permit unity of vision. Few authors propagated a uniform theory of womanhood, even Wedekind shifted his viewpoint in the end. Vilified by Schopenhauer, denigrated by Nietzsche, cursed and blessed in a breath by Strindberg, women could only find comfort in the praises of Ibsen. Caught in this critical cross-fire, many male minds were likewise sadly bemused.

In all literatures, *la femme fatale* has a double aspect—human and allegorical. It is important, if her existence is to be justified, that she should convince us either of her living warmth, or of her symbolic propriety. Too often, the Fatal Woman of German literature fulfils neither of these conditions, or else, in half-fulfilling both, is transformed into a pallid hybrid. Thus Wedekind's prostitutes caricature their profession, and in so doing, lose those elemental vestiges of dignity which they must preserve, if their actions are to be elevated to an allegorical plane. The weakness of the German Fatal Woman partakes of the prime weakness of the Teutonic consciousness—hyper-subjectivity. Her egotisms are too intense. Her fatality is for the most part too narrowly personal, to give the reader a sense of the inter-relationship between her private tragedy and the fatality of the cosmos. Sacher-Masoch, indeed, launched fine theories in respect of this same enigma; but, in

practice, after a brave start, he sank to far lower levels of accomplishment.

Nor are the omens propitious for the future of the Fatal Woman in Germany. National Socialism, by re-introducing the slogan of "the three K's" (or should it be two?), has done much to enhance the domestic virtues. Yet, in being thus primarily subordinated to her maternal function, the German woman of to-day has also lost in personal status and independence. And even her task of procreation, racially sacrosanct, serves questionable ultimate ends. It is debatable whether the Nazis have absorbed the conception of German womanhood as seer-like, and even divine, so piously dwelt upon by Tacitus.

Chapter VIII

MORS, MOMUS, AND MARS

Schmitzler—Ricarda Huch—Hugo von Hofmannsthal—Rilke—Thomas Mann—P Kornfeld—Georg Trakl—Georg Heym—Ludwig Meidner—Gustav Sack—A Ehrenstein—G Benn—Ernst Toller—L Jacobowski—Wassermann—Georg Kaiser—"Klabund"—Hermann Hesse—Hans Carossa—Hanns Johst

IN the twentieth century, German literature of revolt and resignation, of terror and despair, is so various in character, and of such intimidating bulk, that it defies concise definition. A preoccupation with death, a mordant cynicism, a lingering on war and its aftermath—these are salencies of the age. Very few recent German, Byronic books were not shaped beneath the ægis either of *Mors*, *Momus* or *Mars*. We may broadly distinguish four groups of writers. First, there are those who are primarily thinkers or artists—Rilke, Hofmannsthal, the brothers Mann—men curiously of their epoch, and yet not of it, critics of their times, yet denizens of their own, timeless, inner world. Their perception may have been sharpened by the advent of war, but we feel that, had they been born in any other age, they would still have speculated on the grand, ultimate questions of life and death.

A second group is dominated by the poet Georg Heym, and the painter, Ludwig Meidner—enigmatic figures these, who were nothing if not barometers of

their age, clairvoyants, they foretold the world-holocaust in visions of horror. And the War itself left a legacy of chaos that was exploited by nihilists like Gottfried Benn, and Alfred Ehrenstem, and by the playwright of Expressionism, Georg Kaiser. Finally, in the work of Hermann Hesse, Hanns Johst, and Hans Carossa, we can trace various phases of the approach to a new spirit of affirmation, culminating in the ferocious *Bejahung* of the Nazi creed.

A sense of the importance of death is omnipresent in German literature. From the Lay of Hildebrand, with its bare recital of tragic strife, to the gnostic verse of Rilke, the essence of death has been analysed through the centuries with ever-increasing subtlety by the German mind. The Humanist revolt against death is mirrored in *The Bohemian Ploughman* (*Der Ackermann aus Bohmen*, 1400). Luther's dread forebodings remind us of Dr. Johnson. In the seventeenth century, German literature is saturated with the very aroma of mortality. Even during the *Aufklärung*, which was so ready to countenance simple, and unproblematical solutions to the riddle of the universe, Lessing busied himself with the conception of death held by the ancients (*Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet*, 1769). The poetry of Novalis, the realism of Storm, Nietzsche's Dionysiac Wisdom, are all informed by that spirit termed by Lassalle, "arbitration with the Negative"—with death.

More recent writers, such as Hofmannsthal and Thomas Mann, who tried conclusions with Death on the grand scale, owed something to the more immediate precedent established by Arthur Schnitzler. In particular, the Jewish strain in Hofmannsthal responded to the peculiarly Hebraic cult of evanescence in Schnitzler. There was Byronism of a kind in Schnitzler, but it was Byronism

devitalized by a perpetual consciousness of the transience of all things. As a doctor, Schnitzler could not escape preoccupation with the change of the flesh. As a psychologist, he could remove the barriers between fact and phantasy. Hence the dream-like quality that pervades his images of waking life. In his plays, life unfolds itself with the episodic incoherence of a badly cut film. Schnitzler's inability to regard waking consciousness, dreams, and death, as three distinct phases of existence, betokens that aberration of instinct which Nietzsche deemed a fatal symptom of decadence. Since we mostly experience time as a continuous present, it would be reasonable to deny the objective existence *now* of the past and the future; but Schnitzler is so intent on bewailing the passing of the hours, that in *The Lonely Road* (*Der einsame Weg*, 1903), he even denies the existence of the present! The events of life, he says, assail us so eagerly, that they have already drifted into the past, before we can appreciate their savour. Schnitzler must have been perilously close, at times, to the disintegration of consciousness suffered by Lenau.

The harping on the mutability of the organic, rife amongst German authors in the 'nineties, was partly occasioned by the family chronicles of the French Naturalists. Zola's lugubrious panorama of the Rougon-Macquart, turned men's thoughts to the dusty decay of the *bourgeoisie*. One of the earliest German novels to portray the decline of a patrician family residing in a North German Hanseatic town, was not Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*—though his work is indisputably the finest of its kind—but Ricarda Huch's *Reminiscences of Ludolf Ursleu the Younger* (1892). Most of the characters in this book have the bloodlessness of museum-pieces, for we only see them through the eyes of a survivor of the

family, who has immured himself in a monastery, and is now bent on re-analysing his past experience. In his cloistered haven, Ludolf Ursleu has at last achieved a detached serenity; inevitably, by contrast, past events appear as feverish illusions.

The inability to exploit the passing moment, to taste its unique quality to the full, also forms the central problem in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's dramatic poem, *Death and the Fool* (1893), just as a century before, the same predicament had fashioned the core of Goethe's *Faust*. Hofmannsthal, with the precocity that is so often the fruit of mixed blood, had written this poem when only nineteen, and its pendant, *The Death of Titian*, a year earlier¹. While *The Death of Titian* is the apotheosis of a life of creative vigour, the later drama is the sad weighing-up by the young dilettante Claudio, of his futile existence. Strive as he will to grasp it, life remains intangible to him.

In the setting of his poem, Hofmannsthal has deliberately challenged comparison with Goethe. But while Faust is encompassed, during his opening monologue, by the apparatus of the scholar and the alchemist, Claudio is surrounded by the *objets d'art* of the dilettante. Claudio is however, as disgruntled as his illustrious predecessor with his "lumber-room, full of tawdry rubbish", for art, like science, can erect a barrier between its devotees and life. Claudio has, indeed, mingled with the throng; yet, despite a host of adventures and love affairs, neither true joy nor true sorrow have ever come his way. He does not voice the sentimentality of an earlier epoch. He is victimized by the emotional impotence of the intellectual. "Emaciated by thought," he longs for death. To Claudio, every event is symbolic of a thousand others, and so cannot be appreciated in itself. He

describes the resulting amorphousness of life in imagery reminiscent of Lenau's *Faust*

*“Und was mich qualte und was mich erfreute,
Mir war, als ob es me sich selbst bedeute,
Nein, künftigen Lebens vorgeliehnen Schein
Und hohles Bild von einem vollern Sein.
So hab ich mich in Leid und jeder Liebe
Verwirrt mit Schatten nur herumgeschlagen. . .”*

The figure of Death now appears, heralded, as so often in the literature of this epoch, by music of seductive sweetness. He comes to claim Claudio. Fear accomplishes what all the blandishments of wealth and youth had been unable to do, it stimulates Claudio into an awareness of the immense possibilities of life. But in vain Claudio pleads that henceforth his fellowmen will not be to him as “puppets.” In vain he vows that he will learn “Fidelity”—the sole virtue which gives substance to life. When Death makes to haul him away, Claudio can only retaliate by a feeble resort to paradox: “Since my Life was even Death, be thou my Life, O Death!” And as he reaches the very portals of Death, Claudio compares himself with a dreamer who, through a surfeit of dreams, is precipitated into consciousness once more. Death however rather mars this last flight of fancy, by retorting in effect. “What strange creatures men are, they can even interpret the incomprehensible to their own satisfaction!”

Claudio's desire to *minge* life and death, to deny that the moment of death is an equator separating two different states of being, is again closely akin to the philosophy of Lenau. Yet, though Hofmannsthal shows us Death refusing to be cajoled by Claudio's pleas, he

would have us believe that Death is the prime stimulator of humanity—that He is indeed “of the clan of Venus and Dionysos.” But the formula “eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die,” is one of many Decadent dogmas that have a deceptively positive guise. Only the anæmic need Death at their elbow before they can taste the flavour of life. . . .

The conviction of the interpenetration of life and death cultivated by Hofmannsthal, also informs the work of Rainer Maria Rilke. Rilke even tried to fashion, what at best is a mystical submission of faith, into a pseudo-philosophical system. Firstly, like all heirs of the Romantic tradition, he believed in a mutual conditioning of love and death. And he postulated a Great Death within each one of us, slowly ripening, the very pivot of our existence, and having vital affiliations both with our manner of life in this world, and our transfiguration in the next. This doctrine mirrored Rilke’s fear lest after all, death might bring a severance in organic growth. It was a way of erasing the conception of death as a blank wall, as annihilation. But, unfortunately, if this view robbed death of its terrors, it also devalued most of the accepted norms of earthly existence. If all the resources of life are to be focused on its “end,” then our present physical state must be regarded as a prelude—a prelude rich in promise, but, nevertheless, devoid of abiding significance. If Rilke was a man without roots, a poet with “no home in Time,” his loneliness, like Schnitzler’s, was deliberate. In attempting to oust death as the atheist or agnostic sees it, he also ousted life as humanity at large knows it.

One aspect of Rilke’s duel with Death is his analysis of disease. He points out, in *Malte Laurids Brigge*, that in the eyes of the medical profession, every disease has

its peculiar, lethal termination, and he rebukes doctors for thus neutrally cataloguing the pregnant surcease of life. Is it reasonable, he asks, that the conclusion of a long life of self-development should answer to a formula in a text-book, detached from the experience of the moribund man? To this one might give the philosophical rejoinder, that what is "unreasonable" to the eye of man, may seem "reasonable" to the eye of God—or the more concrete riposte, that many forms of death which in the eyes of a poet, perhaps seem unrelated to a man's career, contain a fundamental logic for the more objective scrutiny of the medico or psychologist. What Rilke fears in disease is its impersonality, in such straits he will clutch at any metaphysical straw, to preserve man's sacred ego. Rilke has come in for a good deal of adulation of late, but it is difficult to see that his hysterical fear of extinction bequeathes any notable testament to human *thought*, however much his superb rhythms, and creative use of diction, may have their æsthetic justification?

Rilke might have developed into a notable Byronic figure. There is much that is Byronic in his resurrection of Old Prague in the early *Votive Offerings to my Household Deities* (*Larenopfer*, 1896). He found however, in Catholicism, immunity against the disintegrating forces of Byronism, and was thus able to develop a passive heroism, foreign to the true Byronic creed.

More resilient than the poet Rilke, the brothers Thomas and Heinrich Mann—and more particularly Thomas—had strength to reject their early sympathy with Death. Heinrich, the slave of colour, light, and rhythm, found a healing balm in the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*. Thomas, the profounder dialectician, has for the space of a generation, waged a bitter struggle against

the philosophy of resignation. Both men have also found distraction in political theory.

In his *Buddenbrooks* (1901), Thomas Mann had written a biological commentary on Decadence, by tracing, through four generations, the gradual decay of an originally robust, merchant stock. This type of family-chronicle was popular at the time, if only because it could illustrate, on an ample scale, the insubstantiality of life. Just as at the end of Ricarda Huch's *Reminiscences of Ludolf Ursleu the Younger*, the hero is left to ponder on the vanished pomp of his house, so, at the end of *Buddenbrooks*, Tony, whose own ingenuousness now seems all the more touching, mourns the labours of a century, whose fruits have vanished into thin air.

In Mann's early work we are ever conscious of the omnipotence of Death. In the "Novelle" *The Cemetery Path*, he has shown how "the small man" (effectively symbolized in the name Lobgott Piepsam), when tried by material cares, must necessarily feel drawn towards a "blessed release." In *Buddenbrooks*, Consul Thomas becomes a Schopenhauer-addict, in him, the lure of extinction is disguised as philosophy. And then come the artists and creators, whom Mann believes subject to a kind of living death. "To be a real creator," says Tomio Kroger, "you must first die . . ." In the "Novelle" *Pippo Spano*, Heinrich Mann asserts with equal assurance that the private life of an artist should approach a vacuum. "He must husband his own soul, that others may intoxicate themselves with it." This theory, that artists must carefully conserve their energy, had originally been propounded by Nietzsche in *The Will to Power*. "Their vampire, that is—their talent, begrudges them the squandering of energy we name 'passion.' Granted talent, you also become the victim

of that talent, it subjects you to its vampirism." Here, yet once more, we find the theory of Byronic anæmia, refurbished in the work of the brothers Mann! One of the difficulties of the theory is, that it contradicts the process of catharsis often experienced by authors in their labours—amongst others by Goethe in his *Werther*. For, if Nietzsche and his disciples are right, then the creative act is not the spontaneous tapping (and hence too, the reduction) of involuntary passion, but the voluntary tapping of energies that have been jealously guarded from passion.

Though so receptive to the atmosphere of death, Thomas Mann was never content to regard himself as an elegiac scribbler. On the contrary—and here again, his brother resembles him—he has always expressed envy and admiration for the strong, naive, enjoyers of life, the unproblematical "people of the light" (*Lichtmenschen*), who are too busy appreciating the tang of existence to know the savour of death. Yet, even if Mann became aware that it is probably better for mankind to regard death as a foe than as a friend, it was a long time before he could give an unhesitating verdict in favour of the *Lichtmenschen*, for, to reject death, was to discard an alluring, æsthetic pose.

The "Novellen," *Tomio Kroger* and *Tristan*, are both foretokens of *The Magic Mountain*, the lengthy analysis of life in a Swiss sanatorium, where Thomas Mann, in the guise of his hero, Hans Castorp, makes his final reckoning with Death. Castorp ultimately emerges from his mountain-retreat, to fight in Flanders. The moral is plain: the highest tribute we can pay the universe is to grapple realistically with our destiny, and not become absorbed in barren speculation. Like Hofmannsthal, Thomas Mann believes that to face death, even in

the drab form of disease, is to be granted a vital, positive experience, since it may galvanize us into a consciousness of how much there is worth striving for in life. Unlike Rilke, he does not believe that death should therefore be made an end in itself, *during life*. Death, as Mann sees it, is a great pedagogue—perhaps the only one who can teach the Nihilist a lesson, Death is “*der genuine Weg*” to Life! But once the Nihilist has learned his lesson, let him not seek mystical affinities between life and death, but instead, serve life whole-heartedly.

Thomas Mann clinched the grand debate on Death which had split German authorhood into rival factions, ever since Schnitzler, himself heir to a long tradition, had broached the problem anew. While Mann's arguments marked a signal victory for the spirit of affirmation, the last remnants of Byronic Idealism, stale and insipid after a century of use and misuse, were still being purveyed to a reluctant market by the lesser fry of German literature. Thus Paul Kornfeld, an Austrian Jewish writer, propagated an immature *Weltschmerz* that sometimes verges on parody. Believing in the primacy of the soul and the intellect over the body, but unable to realize his ideal in its inherent grandeur, Kornfeld sought revenge against the deficiencies of the universe by damning the body. “As long as we strive upwards, while imprisoned within our present, transient state, we remain a part of Nature, that is to say, vulgar.” *The Seduction* (1917), is a long and mournful dramatic exposition of the shortcomings of existence. The hero, suitably dubbed “Bitterlich,” wins some satisfaction by strangling a *Philister*—a person whom he can only regard as a loathsomely unmetaphysical child of Nature. Bitterlich's judges are so impressed by the ideal motive the defendant has found for murder, that they are eager

to let him escape! But Bitterlich, for his part, has had enough of this vale of tears, and though briefly "seduced" back to life by lovely woman, he soon finds his quietus, to the accompaniment of a show of soulful violence. *Heaven and Hell* (1920) is even more ecstatic. But Kornfeld found it difficult to keep up the pace, the tone of his post-War work suggests that his soul was able, after all, to effect a compromise with his body.

More mellow, less intransigent than Kornfeld's, is the melancholy of George Trakl—most lovable of alcohol-addicts. Trakl was an Austrian who, on the outbreak of the Great War, was wise enough to become insane. But before he had joined the spirit of his master, Holderlin, he had written some deliciously maudlin verse, that, of its kind, is perhaps the best achieved in German. Trakl was not so crude as to present his self-pity to his audience in the challenge of the drama, instead he let it seep slowly and intimately into his reader's consciousness in the weird, powerfully evocative lines of his Impressionist lyrics:

*"Sonne, herbstlich dünn und zag,
Und das Obst fällt von den Bäumen.
Stille wohnt in blauen Räumen
Einen langen Nachmittag*

*Sterbeklänge von Metall,
Und ein weisses Tier bricht nieder.
Brauner Mädchen rauhe Lieder
Sind verweht im Blatterfall*

*Stirne Gottes Farben träumt,
Spurt des Wahnsinns sanfte Flügel.
Schatten drehen sich am Hügel
Von Verwesung schwarz umsaumt*

*Dammerung voll Ruh und Wein,
Traurige Gitarren rinnen,
Und zur milden Lampe drinnen
Kehrst du wie im Traume ein"*

Such a reverie seems emancipated from the clamorous background of Trakl's epoch. Sometimes, however, the poet emerged from the timeless universe of alcohol. Then, a prophetic terror crept into his verse. Like Georg Heym and Ludwig Meidner, he felt disaster impending in the uneasy years that precluded the Great War. One of his poems begins "Catastrophe stalks ghostly through the afternoon" In his ears dinned "the horrible laughter of gold," and he recoiled from the seamy side concealed beneath the outward glitter of city life

Georg Heym did not even live to see the outbreak of hostilities. He was drowned in 1912, when only twenty-five. Like Ludwig Meidner, he was a Silesian. His poems of chaos have the apocalyptic intensity we associate with artists from this Slavonic outpost of Germany. The two slim volumes, *The Ever-lasting Day* (1911) and *Umbra Vitae* (1912), contain feverish impressions of life in the purgus of Berlin. Heym was blind to metropolitan gaiety, only a procession of beggars, cripples, and lunatics parade before us. We are taken inside their gloomy hovels, and breathe the foul reek of their cellars. Then follows a visit to the morgue, we muse on the fate of those who now lie here—these "*Ikariden*" who once set out like ourselves, brim-full of health and hope, to conquer life.

But there is more in Heym than an accumulation of nauseating detail. His visions of "the demons of the town," squatting huge and uncouth on city roofs, warping the souls of humanity, are instinct with a rare,

allegoric grandeur. Equally imposing, are the poems which resonate to the first, muttered undertones of war. There is even a kind of nostalgia in his image of Mars at last stirring in his sleep, as though the War will at least bring redress for an over-urbanized humanity. Heym's intimations of chaos and disaster are in the best tradition of the *Edda*, and *The Twilight of the Gods*. They remind us of the close affiliations between all such prophecy and Byronism.

If Heym generally recoils in loathing from the images he has himself conjured up, Ludwig Meidner hugs disaster to his breast. In every stroke of his brush, in every line from his pen, there is fierce acceptance of a hysteria-ridden universe. His landscapes quiver in the sulphurous death-throes of an age. Even in his portraits, the anatomy of the face seems to be in a flux, as though about to be dissolved by its inherent energy! Meidner's exultant creative vigour is clearly akin to the nihilistic frenzy of Przybyszewski. "Why," he asks, "does the sight of fire give me such pleasure? Why do I like lofty towers, crumbling houses and cities, eclipses of the moon, and torrential winter downpours? Why do burials, naked rotting corpses, and the feverish cries of the dying fill me with delight?"

Oddly, it was in 1913, and not in the following years, that Meidner executed his finest apocalyptic landscapes. As so often with neurotics of his type, Meidner's sadism did not spare his own person. In his self-portraits, he was often tempted to add blood and wounds. An autobiographical sketch, written just after the War, concludes startlingly. "I shall throw myself in front of a suburban train, so that the wheels will screech their way into my ecstatic brain. And so—ever on, on to a great and grandiose death!"

While in the trenches, Meidner discovered that he was a writer as well as a painter. He had visions of becoming "a second Byron, Heine, or Victor Hugo." The pages of *The Starry Ocean Behind* (*Im Nacken das Sternenmeer*, 1918), and of his *September Cry* (1920), mirror his indecision, whether to abandon himself entirely to orgiastic creation, or to follow the still small voice that sometimes made itself heard between bouts of painting. Significantly, his second book bears the sub-title "Hymns, Prayers, and Blasphemies." Meidner's confessions are too agitated and undisciplined to rank as great literature, but they form an indispensable commentary on the gruesome vigour of his brushwork.

Meidner's effusions represent a *non plus ultra* of nihilism. The prose of Gustav Sack, the Rhinelander—like Meidner a fervent admirer of Byron and the *Edda*—has an astringent quality lacking in the Silesian. Sack was a would-be *Naturkerl*, a man and a writer of excessive virility. Like Meidner, he could not escape the antagonism between body and soul. But while he saw clearly that humanity strives for many incompatible goals, he yet acclaimed their several values. He therefore preaches an unabashed dualism of the intellect and the senses, he urges his disciples to be alternatively as intoxicated as a Dionysiac god, and then as sober as a fish in the icest beck on the fells. This engaging theory was propounded in the posthumous *A Debauched Student* (1917), and *A Man without a Name* (1919). Sack says in effect "I am hopelessly self-divided, but since the fissure is unbridgeable, I had better ignore it."

This was easier said than done. The hero of *A Man without a Name*, discovered that his theory of justifiable

intoxication was, in reality, only an unseemly escape. A self-convicted coward, he hanged himself. Sack would have us compare this suicidal inebriate with the hero of *Paralysis*—an extremely Nietzschean recluse. This "Lord of the World" is emancipated from the snare of the senses, and lives solitary amid his mountains and glaciers, "remote and pure" as stone, but also "deaf and chill as stone—and completely sterile." Obviously, Sack's frank recognition of man's dualism was not in itself a universal salve. His best work was perhaps achieved in the rare moments when he had lost sight of the fissure altogether, and so was able to expend his lavish talent undividedly, either on a glorification of the visible world, or in extolling ethereal horizons of the mind. Then, thanks to the rude *élan* of his style, as to his dislike of all dilettante æstheticism, he created a monument of worth to his militant, positive form of Byronism. It would be pleasant to think that when Gustav Sack fell in 1916 on the Eastern Front, the spirit of Byron hovered near, to commend his congenial death, and address a welcome to a boon companion.

Sack was one of many of his generation who had yearned for war, beholding in it a stern test of masculinity, and perhaps, a final refuge from an effete intellectualism. To such Nietzschean argument there was added, in the early months of conflict, the impassioned, chauvinistic ardour of adolescent poets. Byronic authors reacted to the War in two ways: the idealists, provided they did not wish to submerge their idealism (like Sack), recoiled from this nadir of civilized depravity; the nihilists, on the other hand, prepared to wallow in the blood-bath. Often, the nihilists were overcome by a new disillusionment. They discovered that they were only parlour-nihilists. While a smear of red paint,

æsthetically attuned to the motif of a canvas, had brought them an agreeable titillation, the carnage of the Western Front merely induced nausea!

The War was not only a shock for the parlour-nihilists. Thousands of combatants had enlisted, convinced by the morbid speculation of the age, of the inefficacy of the human mind. They had however retained some faith in the power of wind and limb. To such men, the War gave proof not merely of political incompetence in high places, but also turned into a ghastly demonstration of the feebleness of the human body. As a result, the literature of the revolutionary years was sated with a new anarchy that was as contemptuous of all intellectual aspiration, as it was of the physical graces. Remarque and Ernst Glaeser led this last and most desperate onslaught on accepted values. It seemed that only one virtue remained—comradeship; but it is difficult to admire the friendship of homunculi—and modern warfare had seemingly reduced warriors to ants!

From 1918 until the middle 'twenties, amid the wretchedness of inflation, and all the aggravations that attended internal reconstruction, the stage was set in Germany for a new Byronic literature of uncompromising intensity. Only when we realize that suicides were counted during this epoch not in hundreds, but by tens of thousands, are we able to guess at the depths of despair which provoked this uncouth and elemental expression of woe. For sheer horror, and unmitigated pessimism, Jewish writers, who had been in the business since Job, generally outvied their Aryan rivals. There can be no advance on the medical nihilism of Gottfried Benn, or the world-weariness of Albert Ehrenstein.

Ehrenstein, a Viennese Decadent, began publishing

plaintive, adolescent verse in 1914, but the War, turning Europa into "Barbaropa" completed his discomfiture. There is scarcely a ray of hope to be detected in his post-War poems. He despairs of Christianity, Judaism, love, war, and fame alike. He even fears death chiefly on the score that it may entail renewed existence:

"Von den Eichen der Gotter
Fallen die Fruchte
Durch Schweine zum Kot,
Aus dem sich die Dufte
der Rosen erheben
in entsetzlichem Kreislauf,
Leiche ist Keim,
Und Keim ist Pest "

Occasionally, his disgust is voiced as a programme of anarchy, he exhorts us to destroy the cities, the machines and the political systems which have led to such immeasurable chaos. But for the most part, Ehrenstein is too tired of it all to protest effectively. Instead, he languishes in that last stage of nihilism described by Nietzsche, where the victim assists his own decline. The poem "*Tedium vitae*" (from *Autumn*, 1923), which begins: "I wish to mourn—to embrace my sorrow," ends laconically, "I wish to die and be buried." To solace himself for the remoteness of human beings, Ehrenstein finds some comfort in his cats, and even in inanimate friends, such as his favourite arm-chair, and other personal *bric-à-brac*. A further way of shutting out dismal reality, is to pursue with the mind's eye exotic, oriental travel. This is a customary relaxation of Klabund, and also of Ehrenstein. In his imitations of Chinese lyrics (*Pe-lo-thien*, 1923; *Po Chü-i*, 1924), Ehrenstein escapes into a world of fable, that yet has

the reassuring, internal stability born of a tranquil culture of 5,000 years.

Ehrenstein's message is doleful, but it does not shock. One needs stout nerves, however, to read Dr. Gottfried Benn's gruesome lyrics of the dissecting room. It is difficult to imagine that this verse would ever have been allowed on the market, had not the mind of Benn's generation been bombarded with actual physical horrors during the War years. Benn was indeed, by no means the first poet to find inspiration in corpses. He might even have claimed the young Schiller as an illustrious predecessor, while more recently, Georg Heym had not shrunk from describing a nest of water-rats in the drowned Ophelia's hair. The same image, heightened by nauseating detail, reappears in Benn. The necrophily of Platen and Waiblinger seems tame by comparison.

Benn dwells unrelentingly on mankind's fundamental, physical impotence. The men and women we are shown in the cancer-wards and on the dissecting-table, appear as mere chemical compounds, whose properties are chiefly unpleasant. And if Benn has no illusions about the body, he is equally sceptical of the mind. In an essay on Expressionist literature, *The Modern Ego* (1920), he tells of the disillusionment suffered by war-weary students, eager for spiritual nourishment, when confronted by the dry-as-dust pedantry of the universities. In the poem "Flesh," a dissected corpse reaches for its brain and, after proclaiming the intellect an aberration of nature, voices its desire to "spew upon my thought-centres." The hospital inmates Benn parades for inspection are so de-spiritualized that even our pity seems out of place. Their ailments may shock us, but the personal woes of beings little more than stocks and stones, fail

to arouse any acute, humanitarian stirrings. It seems proper that the pathological side of Byronism should terminate amid the squalor of disease. . . . Perhaps Benn shows us one phase of nihilism on its death-bed.

The attention of writers like Benn and Ehrenstein is so morbidly focused on probing their own wounds, that they rarely think to suggest remedies. How different is the work of a third Jewish writer, the Communist Ernst Toller, whose dramas are flamboyant protests against the iniquities of the social system! The tragedy *Hinkemann* (1923), faithfully reflects the anguish of the first post-War years. It was written while the author was imprisoned at Niederschonenfeld. Like Benn's verse, it is full of horrors, but these are palliated by Toller's warm-hearted if visionary ideals. We see how Hinkemann, unemployed, half-crippled, and impotent as a result of the War, loses the affection of his wife. In despair, this man who previously would not have hurt the proverbial fly, becomes a performer at a fair-booth. His act consists of biting the throats of live rats and sucking their blood! His wife, tardily repentant, after having deserted Hinkemann, commits suicide, and the play ends on a note of vague yearning for the Communist utopia. It also contains a remarkable Impressionist scene, wherein eight newspaper-boys file across the stage, proclaiming their wares, and at the same time revealing the temper of the age to the audience. "A new spirit in Germany! Our epoch in the Light of Christ! Performance of the moving film-drama, *Passion of our Lord, Jesus Christ*. The celebrated Glin Glenda in the star rôle as the Saviour! The film cost two hundred million marks! In addition, the fight between Carpentier and Dempsey!"

While at Niederschonenfeld, Toller also wrote *The*

Machine-breakers, a play dealing with the Luddite rising at Nottingham in 1815. Here, the author preaches unadulterated Communism, but he also warns the masses not to make martyrs of those who, in secret, may be well disposed towards them. It is with an air of recognition that we meet Lord Byron in the Prologue, pleading, in the House of Lords, against the Bill which was to establish the death-penalty for machine-breaking.

If all German Jewish writers shared the viciously negative creed of Benn and Ehrenstein, the Nazi condemnation of decadent, "Hebrew Art" might meet, if not with approval, at least with understanding. Yet, a complete survey of the relevant literature shows that since the days of Heine and Lassalle, there has been a continuous tradition of assimilation in German Jewish art. Benn and Ehrenstein are the black sheep for whom a man of completely different calibre, like Jacob Wassermann, has to suffer. The problem of assimilation was for many years a bone of contention amongst Jewish and Gentile writers alike. Thus in 1913, Carl Hauptmann devoted a lengthy novel, *Ismael Friedmann*, to the checkered career of a half-Jew. Previously, Heinrich Mann had illustrated an analogous theme in his *Betrüxt the Races* (1907), though here, as in *The Three Goddesses*, the dissonances analysed had sprung from a mixture of Nordic and Romance strains.

The most significant forerunner of Jacob Wassermann, however, and at the same time the representative Jewish author of the Naturalist School, was Ludwig Jacobowski. When he died in 1900 at the age of thirty-two, he had been for two years the editor of *Die Gesellschaft*. Born near Posen in an atmosphere of poverty, the young Jacobowski felt the same dislike for the apathy of the Slav world, the same pride in a progressive German

culture, that had earlier surged within the young Lassalle. Like Lassalle, too, Jacobowski, for all his advocacy of objective Naturalism, had a deep Byronic taint.

In an early work dealing with the Prometheus-legend (*Of Promethean Descent*, 1890), Jacobowski was forced to the distasteful conclusion that Prometheus was an ass! The novel, *Werther the Jew* (1892), was the first of several books, in which he investigated the antagonism between German and Jew. This Jewish Werther does not utter the usual complaints of his kind. Far from decrying the unjust oppression of his race, he acclaims it as righteous punishment! Like most renegades, he is able to denigrate the cause of his people with a vigour at least the equal of its alien detractors. Yet, oddly, he himself illustrates most of the vices he castigates in his fellows! This latter-day Werther is a truly ferocious specimen of the self-divided Jew.

Jacobowski next illustrated his racial problem in an oriental drama, *Diyab the Fool* (1894). This recalls Heine's *Almansor*. Diyab is the son of a Saharan sheikh and a white mother. Because of his mixed blood, his playmates throw stones at him; alone, at night, he sobs out his heart to the desert. He finds he can escape persecution by posing as an idiot, but at the providential moment he displays his real sagacity, to save his tribe from Tuaregs and win the bride. The play bears a motto from Schiller's *Maid of Orleans*: "The world belongs to the King of Fools."

The prose fantasy *Satan Laughed* (1896), is a tribute to the wisdom of Lucifer who, ejected from Paradise, seizes possession of the world with the aid of Woman. In *Loki, the Novel of a God* (1898), Jacobowski's maturest work, Lucifer reappears as the Dark God of Scandinavian mythology. Jacobowski has here treated the conflict

between Balder and Loki as an allegory of Good and Evil, but, at the same time, the swarthy Loki, scorned of other gods, is symbolic of the Jew, outcast amongst a northern people. Loki is able to kill Balder, but the author embroiders the legend with an invention of his own, allowing Balder's son to oust his father's murderer. The moral is thus the comforting one that, although evil may triumph for a while, good must prevail in the end. Indirectly, too, Jacobowski would appear to applaud the defeat of Jewish guile by Nordic virtue; but it is clear that Loki is as much the child of Nietzsche as of Judah.

While Jacobowski seems unable to admire German traits except at the expense of his own race, the richer personality of Jacob Wassermann eschews such crude comparisons. Despite the propriety and dignity of his methods, however, Wassermann has had to suffer more from intolerance than his predecessor. Wassermann, even more than Jacobowski, recalls the tragic predicament of Lassalle.

As a young man, Wassermann knew extreme poverty. Material want, the ill-treatment accorded him by his stepmother, the insults of the unthinking, the uncertainty of his professional prospects—all these factors bred a melancholy in him, which came to the surface at the most inappropriate moment. On joining the army, Wassermann appended to his *curriculum vitae* some lines of sombre verse describing "the vanity of all mortal endeavour and of mine in particular." On perusing this, the sergeant-major and assembled company were duly convulsed!

Wassermann was born at Fürth near Nuremberg, and it was the medieval atmosphere of the latter city, the Gothic cathedral, the figures by Veit Stoss, and the

engravings of Dürer, which first revealed to him the beauties of that Teutonic world alien to his own inheritance. But was it alien? Or was there not something in the legendary half-light of the Middle Ages to which he could sincerely respond? After all, his own ancestors had dwelt in the Rhinelands for centuries. What more natural then, than that Nuremberg should seem to possess a familiar charm?

How else can we explain the fact that Wassermann, as judged on accepted criteria, is not a Jewish writer at all? For he displays none of the usual acrobatics of style, the colourful ecstasies, the quips and pranks; nor is there a trace of the wonted salacious irony. If Wassermann excluded these "Jewish" traits from his work as the result of rigid self-discipline, the wonder only grows. Yet it seems probable that his books, especially *Caspar Hauser* and *The Goose-Man*, represent the climax of a process of assimilation which had occupied several generations. Wassermann's periods betray a craftsmanship that, if anything, is ponderously Saxon. Theodor Fontane could not have written with greater dignity and restraint.

The Goose-Man (1915), was particularly well received by the critics. Its hero, the musician Daniel Nothafft, of Eschenbach, appeared to be a descendant of Wolfram's Parzival. Even now some voices were raised in protest: was it not sacrilege for a Jew to invade the homely, ultra-German atmosphere of the provincial *bourgeoisie*? In 1915, more urgent problems than this occupied the public mind, but with the growth of post-War anti-Semitism, such attacks were increasingly heard.

Like Lassalle, Wassermann knew the bitterness of being rejected by both camps, in whose service he toiled. In his novels, he captured certain aspects of German

domestic life with true felicity. For his pains, he was snubbed as an interloper. But the Jews, whom he had defended in *The Jews of Zirndorf*, also eyed him with suspicion. Zionists, in particular, felt that he had gone over to the enemy. In his recent biography, available in English as *My Life as German and Jew* (*Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude*), Wassermann carefully defines the extent of his assimilation. When he meets a Polish or Galician Jew, he tells us, he is eager to learn of their method of life, but he feels no sense of kinship with them. He may even feel repelled by such Jews, if they have no inherent charm as individuals. In the last resort, Wassermann would draw a clear line of demarcation between a "German Jew" and a "Jewish Jew." The almost complete absence of any such categories in the Nazi scheme of things, is the source of Wassermann's deepest grief.

Despite his bid for assimilation, Wassermann has been forced back upon himself all his life, and hence exposed to the terrors of loneliness. In *Caspar Hauser*, he wrote of a mysterious changeling, heir-presumptive to the throne of Baden, who had grown up in prison in complete isolation. The strange phantasies that come to the boy, as he languishes in captivity, completely cut off from his fellow-men, reflect Wassermann's artificially restricted universe, and the fears of one who is himself an exile.

Wassermann is a writer of more enduring worth, but he is not so sure an index as Benn and Ehrenstein of the social, moral, and intellectual nadir of the post-War years. In measuring the latest phase of German Byronism, we plumb absolute zero in their work. At the other end of the scale come the writers who were the literary vanguard of the Third Reich—men like Rudolf

Binding and Hans Grimm, who, though they may be locally disaffected, yet survey the cosmos as a whole with stern acquiescence. Between these two extremes we may group a number of authors who, each in their varying degrees, have subdued their latent pessimism. Such are Georg Kaiser, Klabund, Hermann Hesse, Hanns Johst, and Hans Carossa.

Georg Kaiser's ripest dramas are born of an unfulfilled hope for "the regeneration of man." In works like *Gas* and *Gats*, the spirit of Rousseau is resurgent. Kaiser loves to dwell on the dire effects of over-mechanization, which culminate in the reduction of man to a robot. In the first part of *Gas* (1918), we see the millionaire-owner of a gas-factory striving to rectify this evil; but the workers, the slaves of their machines, have lost all taste for freedom, and resist his efforts to found new settlements, where, living close to nature, they may regain their sense of individual human worth. While at the end of the first portion of the drama, the millionaire's scheme is nullified, the second part of *Gas* (1920), concludes with a terrible vision of universal annihilation. Gas, the key to industrial power, becomes the chief bone of contention in a war between the Blues and the Yellows. The Yellows enslave the Blues, but threaten to destroy their factories when the production of gas begins to fall. The chief engineer of the Blues bids his workmen be of good cheer, they can bid defiance to the Yellows once more, since he has invented a gas so caustic that, once wafted over the enemy, it leaves a trail of bleached skeletons where before there had been living men! But a descendant of the millionaire of part one, equally hopeful as his ancestor of a regenerate humanity, exhorts them to refrain from resorting to this ghastly weapon. When the workers

pay no heed to him, but instead, applauding the ghoulish inventor, make ready for the attack, the defeated idealist turns the dread gas on his own people! When they see the terrible fate of their enemies, the Yellows are so smitten with awe, that they in turn deliver themselves to self-destruction. Thus, the rival forces become extinct. No ray of light breaks through the gloom of this grim judgement-day, wherein Kaiser has envisaged the ultimate fate of a machine-ridden society.

But at the back of his inventive mind lurked the idea that perhaps, after all, benefits might accrue to mankind from such a holocaust. He incorporated this belief in *Gats*. Here too, the hero derives from Rousseau; or, possibly, he foreshadows Clarence Hatry! He supervises a World Land Settlement League, which aims at distributing surplus population to the thinly inhabited areas of the globe. Yet, after reconnoitring suitable regions, he begins to doubt the efficacy of his scheme. He believes he has stumbled upon a paradise with which it would be unwise to interfere. "There is no hate, no strife amongst these people, who can dispense with law because they love each other—and because, too, when one meets another, he approaches him with the natural yearning that man feels for man. Into his solitude a neighbour intrudes but rarely . . ." Kaiser is attacking indirectly, a further bugbear of city life. we become so sated with our fellows, that companionship is robbed of its inherent charm. Kaiser therefore suggests, in an amusing though logical paradox, that a wider resort to birth-control is the means which will produce the New Man—the man who fully appreciates his brother, because he will meet him so seldom! Practising what he preaches, the supervisor of the World Land Settlement League sterilizes his wife with the new substance—"Gats."

This Quixote even insists that the desired consummation will be soonest achieved, if men of his own stamp are the first to die without issue. For he is of the stuff of the visionaries, the agitators, the "saviours" of humanity, who may precipitate whole generations into strife for the sake of an illusory ideal. Man's innate genius for friendliness will best thrive, if he is not stirred out of a contented quiescence.

But, however much the hero of *Gats* applauds his own renunciation of an heir, his wife, nevertheless, is furious! Hence Kaiser concludes that, though a few males may have caught a glimpse of salvation, the majority of mankind, and women in particular, are not yet ripe for a policy of deliberate reduction in their own numbers. (Curiously, Kaiser's ideal now seems on the verge of fulfilment—though the decrease evident in the size of families is hardly the result of Utopian speculation!) Again, as long as such reduction remains endemic, it will foment, rather than avert war. Yet, though he may feel himself a lone pioneer, and though his only hope for the future entails the application of a method which, at best, is only a tempered nihilism, Kaiser's doctrines can hardly be equated with the jeremiads of Benn and Ehrenstein. He does not regard man as a meaningless cipher, but merely holds that he has taken a wrong turning, and that it is worth-while rescuing him from the scientific materialism which obscures his soul.

Kaiser's collected dramas, however various their themes, have an underlying unity. Even his comedy, *The Jewish Widow*, is imbued with the desire to unmask the heroic, or pseudo-heroic attitude, to strip human achievement of its acquired glamour, and display the fundamental cravings of humanity in their original

paltriness—and integrity. No such central principle informs the work of Alfred Henschke—"Klabund," a Silesian author who was not yet forty when he died of consumption, in 1928. Henschke's pseudonym is itself an autobiography. It is composed of the first syllable of "Klabautermann"—a kind of North German sea-wraith—and the last syllable of "Vagabund." Klabund was thus pleased to call himself "a wandering ghost." His disease kept him travelling between Germany and Switzerland for many years. Most of his work was written either in sanatoria or in the cafés of Berlin. But this itinerant mode of life was not entirely forced upon him. He was also a spiritual vagabond, the devoted admirer of François Villon.

Unfortunately, Klabund diffused his talents. In letters, he was a Jack of all trades. He even wrote a literary history of the world! Since he had such universal interests, it was perhaps inevitable that his original work should lack cohesion. In vain do we seek in his books the "red thread," to vouch for the author's substantial identity. Nevertheless, Klabund did write one personal document of unquestionable integrity, the *Thirty Sonnets* which chronicled the great tragedy of his life. His first wife, likewise a consumptive, died after giving birth to a child, which did not long survive its mother. In the month after his wife's burial, Klabund wrote a sonnet every day, as a tribute to her memory. These are among the most heartfelt elegiac poems written in German in the present century. In the second Sonnet, Klabund can find no compensation for his loss:

*"Ich habe nichts als diesen Wunsch zu sterben
Und meinem Liebling ganz im Tode zu gleichen,
Dem Fergen lachend beide Hände reichen,
Dem Saiften hingegeben wie dem Herben. . . ."*

And in the ninth Sonnet his private grief seems to overshadow the whole world:

“Der Regen regnet tausend Tag und Nacht,
Die Fenster sind von Graugespinnst umhangen
Im See das letzte Licht die Fische fangen.
Das Gute stirbt. Es triumphiert das Schlechte.
Wo ist der Heiland, der Erlösung brachte?”

Ultimately, Klabund discovers that the “Saviour” he could not at first discern, is the very memory of his wife, which makes him proof against the vulgarity and fecklessness of his age.

But Klabund was also something of a vulgarian. He loved nothing better than to *épater le bourgeois*. As a young man he had, in *Klabund's Roundabout* (1913), shocked the Junkers with his cynicism. In post-War Germany he found it all too easy to play the zany. His *Motley Decline of the Occident* (*Kunterbuntergang des Abendlandes*, 1922), a delicious pendant to Spengler, whoops its way through all the pretentious “isms” of the nineteen-twenties. He is as oblivious of reticence as many of the writers he castigates. His *History of the World from the Psycho-analytic Standpoint* begins “God, intensely psychopathic, and a typical neurotic, created the world to rid himself of his complexes. Having neither father nor mother, he is a prey to auto-eroticism. . . .” Klabund also suggests that, since efforts to make man good develop in him a tropism towards evil, the clergy should preach the righteousness of evil, when, from sheer pig-headedness, man would incline towards sanctity!

If much of Klabund's work stands beneath the sign of *Mors* and *Momus*, he was polytheist enough to pay tribute to *Mars* as well. Nowhere, not even in Ferdinand

Lassalle or Gustav Sack, is the double face of Byronism so apparent. Klabund, himself moribund, a pathetic slave of the pen who, during the War, had been accused of pacifist activities, wrote three novels glorifying stern leadership, and derring-do military exploits! In his *Moreau*, it is true, Klabund's hero-worship was bestowed on a soldier of the people—on one who even dared oppose the dictator, Bonaparte. And in his *Mohammed*, the warrior pales before the founder of a religion. But no such disguised ideal irradiates the stark pages of *Pjotr* (1923), the story of Peter the Great of Russia. Perhaps the author felt that any brutalities and excesses could be pardoned a man able to restore a semblance of unity to a land riven by chaos. *Pjotr* may even be an early monument to Germany's post-War nostalgia for the Strong Man.

To the three Klabunds who served *Mors*, *Momus*, and *Mars*, must be added yet a fourth, a pilgrim who casting off his fool's cloak, wanders sedately in a stylized world of mandarins and lotus-blossoms. But his oriental prose and verse is only a self-imposed holiday-task, a brief respite before he returns to the ardours of combat. First and last, Klabund remained a jester. When he wished to write his autobiography, he found a meet framework for his confessions in *Bracke*, a picaresque novel that records the japes of Hans Clawert, a North German rogue and vagabond of the sixteenth century. Klabund was eager to be thought a modern Eulenspiegel, —an Eulenspiegel with a more progressive social conscience. In a poem on François Villon, Klabund tells how the Frenchman, waiting at Heaven's gate, rejects God's intercession in his favour, since it is unaccompanied by a general amnesty for the sufferers in Hell. Alfred Henschke was something of a Nietzschean rebel, and

like Nietzsche, he was prevented by his physical debility from tasting the full fruits of his theories

Perhaps the greatest Byronic figure in German literature of the twenties, was the Swabian, Hermann Hesse. Though, as a wide reader in pessimistic systems, Hesse had undermined his initial ideals with all the tenacity of a scholar, he yet achieved a more balanced maturity than was vouchsafed the majority of his contemporaries. A mellow fragrance attaches to his later work, the lingering essence of his carefully distilled nihilism. Russian blood on his father's side may have played its part in determining Hesse's youthful idiosyncrasies, but a less elusive factor was Calvin's doctrine of predestination. A century before, this same dogma had soured Byron's adolescence. During the War, Hesse's pacifist activities made him an embittered exile in Switzerland, where he wrote many of his finest novels. Buddha and Nietzsche helped him to emerge from this crisis a confirmed "Ja-sager." The influence of Buddhism is particularly strong in his post-War work.

When only twenty, Hesse had demonstrated in *Under the Wheel*, the tragic conflict that must ensue between youthful genius and established pedantry. Three decades later we find him still probing the problems of adolescence in *Demian, the Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth* (1919). The enigmatic Demian who moulds Sinclair's boyhood experiences, appearing to him in a thousand shapes, now good, now evil, now male, now female, symbolizes the Oneness underlying man's seeming disparateness. Hesse can find no fitting terminology in his western idiom to describe Demian's variousness; he likens him to *karma* and the oriental god Abraxas. But Nietzsche, too, speaks with the voice of Demian and gives Emil Sinclair a characteristic re-interpretation of the story of

Cain those who shunned and exiled Cain after he had slain Abel were the weak; too cowardly to attack Cain in turn, they invented the story of the mark God had set upon Cain, to excuse their own pusillanimity! Here, and in many analogous adaptations of Biblical themes, we can see how Nietzsche was responsible for ejecting the figure of the penitent Lucifer from modern German literature. In this matter Nietzsche was more consequent than Byron, since the Englishman, for all his gleeful affirmation of evil, could not free himself from the tradition of wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Yet Hesse has far too supple a mind to conceive that the acceptance of the mark of Cain as a token of superiority necessarily implies the rejection of all that is antagonistic to Cain. It is here that Hesse has made a significant advance on most of his contemporaries. He accepts life, not in its duality—that would be too simple a word—but in all its infinite multiplicity, and refuses stoutly to concede that, at bottom, there is any genuine discord between life's motley components. What is discord to the human ear, may be a perfect chord in the ear of God. It is in man's power to strive towards the God's-eye view of the universe, which is one of absolute tolerance. Man may value certain aspects of life higher than others; indeed, this is inevitable, since otherwise the problem of assessing the universe would never arise at all. But the wise man, the man with an inkling of *karma*, does not completely reject any single aspect of the cosmos, however hideous, barbarous, or anti-social it may appear to our limited earthly vision. Hesse terms this earthly vision "the official world," and he insists that a man who lives entirely in this official world, thereby circumscribes his range of experience. The complete man, who seems akin to Nietzsche's Dionysiac Man, will also

wish to embrace the hazardous complement of "the official world." With such arguments as these, Demian persuades Emil Sinclair to build himself a private religion, "compact of what is divine, but also of what is devilish."

Unlike most Byronic patients with a desire to convalesce, Hesse does not attempt to bridge over his self-dividedness with feeble casuistry. Here he resembles Gustav Sack. But in frankly accepting this inner multiplicity, Hesse is faced with a fresh predicament. If life is to be lived on a thousand different planes, how can a man's personality cohere at all? Hesse offers his solution in *Steppenwolf* (1927), a work of such perturbing originality that it richly deserves its translation into English.⁸

Harry Haller, the "Steppenwolf," is a middle-aged recluse. He has the appearance of a scholar, æsthete, and *bon viveur*. But he resembles an onion with many integuments; the scholar is only its innermost core. One of the outer integuments is a wolf, and the wolf and the scholar are always lying in ambush for each other. "Wolfishly seen, all human activities became horribly absurd and misplaced, stupid and vain. But it was exactly the same when Harry felt and behaved as a wolf . . . For the human part of him then lay in ambush and watched the wolf, calling it brute and beast. . ."

Steppenwolf is more than a modern version of the legend of the werewolf. Hesse brings all the resources of neurology to his aid in his analysis of Harry Haller. Haller is presented as a typical melancholiac. "On no morning in his life had he ever been in good spirits or achieved anything before midday." Moreover, he belongs to "the suicides." Hesse does not mean that the *Steppenwolf* is likely to do away with himself, but that he belongs to the very different category of those who

often think they may. "Just as there are those who at the least indisposition run to a fever, so do those whom we call "suicides" and who are always very emotional and sensitive, run at the least shock to the notion of suicide." Instead of ascribing this tendency to inherent weakness, Hesse calls this gloomy fraternity unusually strong, eager, and hardy. Even so, he does not minimize the risks to which Haller is exposed. But, when we meet Haller and learn of his cure, he is already middle-aged—a tame Steppenwolf. The book is, indeed, exceptional in German Byronic literature, in that it is a study of a middle-aged man, written by a middle-aged man.

Haller's cure is partly accomplished by a woman he meets at a night club. The garish atmosphere of the dance hall is all that is most antithetic to the scholar in him, but, through this very antithesis, he is granted a dim perception of his own and the world's multiplicity. There is even a lengthy episode with a prostitute which recalls the school of Conrad, but Hesse treats the theme with an Olympian sympathy, not with the uneasy bravado of the Naturalists. The full glory and anguish of *karina* is revealed to Haller during a visit to a mysterious Magic Theatre. This theatre is even "curiouser" than the Wonderland of Alice, and we must suppose that Haller is borne thither in a trance. Hesse employs a clever mirror device, to reveal to Haller all his facets and integuments, unclogged by inhibitions. For the first time, Haller is made fully aware of his latent wolfishness, and the strange ecstasies it may portend. He sees too, in the theatre, a man playing chess with himself, the chess-figures are various aspects of his own personality. And as this lone player shuffles the pieces on the board, he intones Hesse's ultimate philosophy: "You may complicate and enrich the game as you please.

It lies in your hands. Just as madness, in a higher sense, is the beginning of all wisdom, so schizophrenia is the beginning of all art and phantasy." Incidentally, we are here given a magnificent defence of certain dubious aspects of Byronism.

Haller becomes inured to playing his part in the human merry-go-round. As a Nietzschean "*Ja-sager*," he continues to experiment with his psyche, while admitting the futility of existence. He hopes to learn yet one more lesson—the lesson of laughter. Laughter is the anodyne to the fear that awareness of one's inner complexity might lead to disruption of the personality. However versatile a man, there is a god in him who can survey his strivings with a smile. Hesse worships this god in the music of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Haller, himself a musician, seeks salvation from the same source. His confession ends. "One day I will learn to laugh."

Hesse, with his largely Nietzschean provenance, must already be regarded as of the old generation. He is too profound a scholar ever to abandon himself to the enthusiasms of the moment. Accordingly, he is a spiritual exile from the Third Reich. But it must seem surprising to the uninitiated, that writers like Hans Carossa and Hanns Johst, vaunted nowadays for their "Nordic" properties, were originally guilty of the Byronic heresy. Nothing could dispose more summarily of the legend that art propagating a negative world-view must be of Semitic origin! Hans Carossa's first novel, *Doctor Burger's End* (1913), has even been named "the *Werther* of the twentieth century."

The son of a specialist in tuberculosis, and himself a surgeon who served in the medical corps in Rumania during the War, Carossa was prompted to devote most of his books to the dissection of doctors' problems. And

his benign bedside manner was potent in restoring many patients who had before fared worse at the hands of the satanic Dr. Benn. For it is undeniable that in his later work, Carossa is a very tower of strength, he quickly disposes of Byronic malingerers. Not so in *Doctor Burger's End!* This is the story of a young practitioner, too apt to escape from his duties into the slumbrous world of Hofmannsthal and Stefan George. At the same time, he is over-conscientious. If a patient dies, then he senses the presence of the dead man's ghost, thirsting for revenge. He feels dimly that somewhere, buried within him, lies a secret that could save humanity. When this symptom of adolescence, instead of being dispelled, becomes ever more acute, he seeks a voluntary death, hoping that thus the immense secret will be revealed. Bürger is therefore not the ferociously self-centred Byronic type. An idea of service to humanity is implicit in his death. This idea became the *Leitmotiv* of Carossa's later work.

Already in 1916, Carossa wrote *A Poem from Dr. Burger's Posthumous Papers*, lines which reveal a high degree of emancipation from the jaundiced imaginings of the earlier novel, a sick child restores Bürger's faith in himself. The *Rumanian Diary*, recording his War experiences, shows how Carossa was gradually steeled by powder and shot to a full consciousness of the nobility of the doctor's mission. Two autobiographical works written since the War, *A Childhood* (1922) and *Metamorphoses of Youth* (1928), are re-creations rather than sober accounts of his boyhood and youth, since they are not filled with the gloom of his first novel, but irradiated with the ripe wisdom of Carossa's maturity.

To press home his message of reconstruction, and avow his faith in the healing power that reposes in simple, elemental things, Carossa returned to the medical

sphere in *Doctor Gion* (1931). This novel represents Carossa's final reckoning with the spirit of Decadence. He draws a contrast between Emerenz, a simple girl from the mountains, and Cynthia, a sculptress, whose intellectual aspirations have robbed her of her natural womanhood. The death of Emerenz in childbirth, awakens in Cynthia a sense of the responsibility of motherhood, and from that moment her essential femininity is restored. Thus baldly narrated, the homily may sound naive, but recounted in Carossa's luminous style, which eschews all pathos, *Doctor Gion* seems a not unworthy example of the tendentious literature that heralded the coming of the Third Reich.

The altruism of the medical profession is a recurrent theme in Nazi literature. It has been used not only by Carossa, but also by Hanns Johst, to symbolize the escape from a narrow individualism, to a sense of the bond that links the individual with the community (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*). The novel wherein Johst stresses this moral is suggestively called *Cross-roads* (1922). It would be difficult to select a writer more apt than Johst to illustrate the parting of the ways. Even in his later work he evokes, half regretfully, a dying epoch, while sounding a fanfare to the new. What could be more revealing than that the same author who in 1928 wrote the stirring confession of faith *I believe!* should two years later have published a novel with the elegiac title, *Thus They Depart, a Novel of the Dying Nobility?*

The early dramatic trilogy, written mainly during the Great War—*The Youth* (1916), *The Solitary* (1917), and *The King* (1920)—represent Johst's attempt to conquer his Byronic malaise; but the optimism manifest at the conclusion of the first section is not well sustained. In *The Youth*, Johst traces in eight Expressionist episodes,

the turbulent adolescence of his hero. We follow the Youth on his Faustian quest, from the time when he first comes into conflict with his schoolmasters, through the inevitable brothel-scene (in which his sanctimonious mentor, Professor Sittensauber, also surprisingly reappears!), and thence to an attack of madness, and an early grave. Musing on the demise of this twenty-four-year-old student, the grave-digger holds that there must after all be some underlying purpose in a career which absorbed life from so many different founts with insatiable eagerness. Johst echoes this pious hope, actually allowing his hero to be born anew. As he swings his leg over the churchyard wall, to continue his life's journey, the Youth tells of the revelation that has come to him. "Thought is mere chatter." He will no longer juggle with ideas, but find salvation in activity. And so the reader is left to wonder whether, after all, with a little manœuvring, the message of Faust can be equated with the Nazi slogan of *Sozialismus der Tat*!

But Goethe did not depreciate the intellect to the same extent as Johst and many another accepted National Socialist writer. Johst sees in the intellect, a servant, that must not trespass on the duties of the many other servants in the temple of the human body. In the essays *Science and Conscience* (1924), he asks: "Is unbridled humanitarianism perhaps only the degeneration of the hands, the eyes and the heart, to the profit of the brain?" Thus, in the rejection of the paramountcy of the intellect, to the supposed profit of the body as a whole, Johst thinks he has found a formula that will accomplish the regeneration of his era.

The Solitary, the second drama of the trilogy, deals with the tragic life of Grabbe. This supplies further evidence of Johst's original inclination towards Byronism.

But the author has not here tried to elucidate any of the psychological, and philosophical problems we associate with Byronism. Grabbe's decline, and the contumely he suffers, are simply presented as an abstract of the Poet's fate. Johst is at pains to reject the problematical legends which obscure Grabbe's "real" personality. He would like to Nazify him, and Kleist as well, into defiant prophets of Fascism.

The concluding drama, *The King*, is an endeavour to put into practice the lesson so painfully acquired by the Youth—"deeds, not words!" But the monarch to whom Johst introduces us, though he has broken the fetters of the intellect, and is moved by a spirit of sincere altruism, is still too much a visionary. His subjects regard his revolutionary changes in administration as the innovations of a crank. With his power trembling in the balance, the King learns the bitter truth "Who believes in the people is chastised by the people, but he who chastises the people wins their loyalty." Nevertheless, rejecting royalty in favour of the medico, Johst was able, in *Cross-roads*, to sketch a more advanced social pattern, wherein the interests of the individual and of society are more efficiently dove-tailed.

Chapter IX

ANGLO-GERMAN ANTITHESIS

J. L. Beddoes—Carlyle—Meredith—J. A. Symonds—Laurence Oliphant—J. S. Le Fanu—Mid-Victorian Byronism—The Wilde Coterie—The last phase J. Conrad, Aldous Huxley, etc.—Anglo-German Antitheses—Triumphs and failures of German Byronism—The English superiority in satire—The expulsion of Byronism from Germany—A vindication of Byronism

GERMAN Byronism, viewed not merely in its widest sense of a pessimistic approach of life, but also in its narrower meaning of a tradition directly engendered by the English poet's work, displays a development of undoubted continuity throughout the past century. When we consider the cosmopolitanism of modern letters, and bear in mind that, for four generations since Byron's death, writers in every European tongue have been giving disconsolate utterance to more topical urgencies than their English precursor could know in 1820, we can only marvel that a present-day German trio like Gustav Sack, Ludwig Meidner, and Ernst Toller should hark back to that now remote source. But there is a double reason why Byron's name is still not extinct in Germany: the applause that first greeted him abroad was so vociferous that its echoes have even now not entirely faded, and—a more pregnant factor—the disenchantment rife in Europe after the Great War, with

its resemblance to the frustration of the post-Napoleonic era, has rejuvenated Byron's message.

The story of English Byronism runs broadly parallel to its German reflection. As in Germany, so in this country, there were three periods of especial Byronic activity: the Byronic Age proper; *fin de siècle*—termed by Osbert Burdett "the Beardsley period"; and the post-War resurgence of pessimism. But there was one patent difference in the development of English Byronism. In the middle years of the nineteenth century, the Byronic pose was fiercely assailed—mordantly by Carlyle, wittily by Thackeray. Such attacks, together with the conspiracy of silence due to Byron's notoriety, helped to create a wide gap between the Byronism of the Romantics, and the Byronism of the Decadents. In Germany, however, continuity of a kind was preserved, thanks to the emergence of Schopenhauer. Bestriding the mid-century, Schopenhauer revealed marked affiliations both with the preceding and subsequent literary epochs. Moreover, Byron's work was never impugned in Germany on grounds of scandal; indeed, we have seen how, what was a source of aggravation to the entrenched forces of Victorianism, was avidly seized upon by German writers, and used as a weapon to unmask the English mud-gods. Goethe may have frowned on the pathological symptoms in Byron's work; but, at the same time, he fussed round his *protégé* like an old hen. In the light of the precedent created by Goethe's forbearance, Byron became practically immune, abroad, against attacks that were merely prudish.

It is true that, in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, a large part of Germany was animated by the spirit of Fichte. This spirit, which defied Duty and had a strong puritanical trend, was largely identical with

Carlyle's message. But Fichte, more academic than Carlyle, was less in touch with the forces of general literature. He was too laboriously engaged in erecting systems, and sifting categories, to cock a snook at the vehemence, amorality, and bizarrerie of the Byronic tradition.

What Fichte was too aloof to do, might conceivably have been accomplished by another Englishman whom Germany took to her bosom—the gifted, Celtic misanthrope, Thomas Lovell Beddoes. How great was his promise, we may judge from *The Improvisatore* (1821), published when the author was only eighteen. We have it on the authority of Sir Edmund Gosse that this poem is “better than the verse published by Byron, Keats, and Shelley at the same age.” Beddoes turned something of a renegade when he landed at Hamburg, in July 1825. Until his death, twenty-four years later at Basle, he continued to reside mainly abroad. He studied medicine at Göttingen, graduated M.D. at Würzburg, and well-nigh became Professor of Medicine at Zürich. So completely did he master his new tongue that he contributed political lampoons to German newspapers, and even began a translation of the *Nibelungenlied*.

The creative fire that lent incandescence to *The Improvisatore*, was soon dulled. Beddoes wrote very little. His inquiring mind turned more readily to inspired literary gossip than to the arduous labour of composition. His letters to his sole English friend, Thomas Forbes Kelsall, have something of Byron's racy vein. They are crammed with university chit-chat and with delicious gibes at the literati (It is a thought startling, however, to hear Goethe referred to as “the old pig of Weimar”!) Beddoes was on intimate terms with some of the greatest German scholars of his day. At Göttingen he

read Shelley and Coleridge with G. F. Benecke. But it is doubtful whether he was then regarded in Germany, any more than in England, as a poet in his own right. Benecke saw in him a rising young doctor who liked to beguile his spare time with verse. This is a pity; Beddoes' masterpiece, *Death's Jest Book* (completed about 1826), would have contained a salutary message for many of the lesser, German Byronic fry.

Beddoes approaches "dotard Death," as an anatomist. Familiarity with death breeds in him not increase, and, ultimately, satiety of horror, as with Benn, but rather, contempt. He wishes to send death "an unmasked braggart to his bankrupt den"—

" of his night,
His moony ghostliness and silent might
To rob him, to uncypress him i' the light.
To unmask all his secrets, make him play
Momus o'er wine by torchlight ."

If "the old pig of Weimar" had given his benediction to such sentiment as this, as well as to Byron's achievement, Germany might have been spared some of the unhealthy emotionalism, with which the Romantics celebrated their own obsequies. Yet, Beddoes was also partly cast in the Byronic mould. In *The Phantom-Wooer*, the amorous wraith urges his love to put off her warm flesh, and succumb to the seductiveness of "the quiet tomb." At the last, Beddoes could not resist the fatal lure, that "moony ghostliness," of which he had made mock in *Death's Jest Book*. He died of poison self-administered.

About the time of Beddoes' death, it was becoming increasingly fashionable in England to decry Byron.

Before Carlyle's thunders, the Byronic epigoni wilted and shrank. Carlyle was all the more pitiless in attack, because of the necessity for subduing his own, early Byronic phase. The "Wotton Renufed" of his first tale, had started life as an arrant sceptic. Even Teufelsdröckh, after the sad conclusion of his love-tyll, had felt himself drawn towards the writing of "Satanic poetry." The application of the lash in the tenth chapter of *Sartor*, where Carlyle chastises the Dandy, is therefore, in part, self-castigation. But Carlyle, like Disraeli, whom he influenced, succeeded in appeasing his mutinous past.

In the wake of Carlyle followed Thackeray and Meredith. Thackeray held up the Dandy to ridicule in *Vanity Fair*. Meredith, in *Beauchamp's Career* (1876), offered the public a refreshing hero who did not crave sympathy in "melodious lamentations," but whose programme was "the obverse of Byronism," since it consisted principally in "working and fighting." But, in carrying Carlyle's doctrines to extremes, Meredith wilfully undermined their efficacy. Beauchamp's rigid sense of duty, and his absurdly amiable altruism, prove almost as baleful in their final results as the "fatal embrace" of Manfred! Fervently anti-Byronic, Beauchamp essays a course of life diametrically opposed to all egoistic posturing. But, the very vehemence of his antagonism, renders him Byronicallly unbalanced. His career is as wasteful, futile, and destructive, as that of his unscrupulous rival. Did Meredith perhaps write *Beauchamp's Career* with his tongue in his cheek? It is difficult to credit that one who, with Burns, demonstrated the melancholy fate that attends "the best laid schemes o' mice and men," could be completely intolerant of Byronism.

Byron's martyrdom in England was threefold. During his lifetime, society branded him a monster. After his death, his design for living was assailed as mischievous and infantile. Finally, towards the close of the century, when there was nothing else left to revile, an attack was launched on the inner sanctuary of Byron the artist. Swinburne, that immaculate metrist, took aim at the easy target of Byron's verse-structure. It was all in vain that Matthew Arnold protested, recalling how Ruskin had set Byron above Shakespeare. In their solemn seat of learning, George Saintsbury and Andrew Lang continued to revile Byron's prosody, seconding Swinburne's strictures.

In view of such massed attack, it is not surprising that the Byronic verse of the mid-Victorian era, is decidedly tepid in flavour. Even the admiration for Byron, emulously expressed by Alfred Austin and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, appears incongruous; their temper was more genuinely revealed when they sang preciously of the joys of country life. John Addington Symonds, gloomily introspective, "a Hamlet among modern men," was constitutionally more fitted to be a Byronic votary. In his *Animi Figura* (1882), he struck a deeper note than Blunt or Austin. Tennyson, too, displays something of the Byronic frenzy in the more nightmarish portions of *Maud*. But the age that reared a Darwin was out of tune with frenzy; it believed with Browning that the dark places of the soul must be sagaciously palpated, not revealed with Dionysiac abandon.

The English novel of this period was equally lacking in Byronic verve and subtlety. For a brief space, in the sixties, Laurence Oliphant's *Piccadilly*, with its startling analysis of madness, stirred the literary world.

Oliphant, however, a mercurial figure, whose diplomatic exploits were then famous all over the globe, was soon to sink into obscurity as the abject henchman of a revivalist charlatan. A debased form of Byronic hero reappeared at this time, in the popular pages of the tales of terror. The villainous old man drawn by Sheridan Le Fanu in *Uncle Silas*, was a patent reincarnation of the Byronic type. Possibly, the similarity is limited to externals—though there is a hint also of the complicated, inner duality, in Uncle Silas's attachment to the philosophy of Swedenborg. At all events, it is of interest to note how the wheel has come full circle, how Byronism has returned to its native atmosphere of diablerie; for, it will be recollected that the Byronic type was originally brought to birth amid the supernatural machinery of Mrs Radcliffe's novels.

If there was a paucity of Byronic talent during the 'sixties and 'seventies in England, this deficiency was more than remedied by the copiousness of the two succeeding decades. Aubrey Beardsley's drawings, full of a shuddering awareness of evil, tell of the new problematic spirit that invested the work of *fin de siècle* writers. Ernest Dowson sang of "the inconstant flesh at issue with the constant soul." Lionel Johnson, toper and theologian, proclaimed the New Dandyism, in the phrase—"life is ritual." John Davidson, "a Nietzsche without his genius," imitated the strenuous, Gargantuan diction of Marlowe, without however achieving more than incoherent rodomontade. A. E. Housman essayed a more virile nostalgia. Francis Adams, in *A Child of the Age*, plumbed the depths of the new introspection. And in his *Spiritual Adventures*, Arthur Symonds produced an elegant text-book for students of the neurotic. It was an age that ran the whole gamut of melancholy,

from the pessimistic æstheticism of Wilde, to the more meaningful austerity of Hardy.

With the onrush of civilization, life in the 'nineties had grown more complex than in the days of Byron. The range of contemporary problems was wider, vistas into the future more enigmatic. Yet, on the whole, the fundamental dissonances and dissidences which thwarted men like Symonds and Wilde, are astonishingly similar to the problems which beset the Romantics. There are the same laments over the gulf between the real and the ideal. There is the same insistence on the disharmony of the sexes. There is also, the same attempt to invert the moral values, except that this is now given an æsthetic rather than a philosophical justification.

During the Beardsley Period, the Fatal Woman flourished in England. Walter Pater had lent her new dignity by discovering her prototype in the Gioconda. In the face of Leonardo's masterpiece, he discovered the patient knowledge of countless generations, as well as "the secrets of the grave." Wilde and Swinburne, in their treatment of the Fatal Woman both strove to retain this allegorical significance. Later, more popular heroines, such as Joseph Conrad's Dona Rita in *The Arrow of Gold*, were endowed with the same gift of evoking enigmatic, historical vistas:

"The face, after the first glance given to the whole person, drew irresistibly your gaze to itself by an indefinable quality of charm beyond all analysis and made you think of remote races, of strange generations, of the souls of women sculptured on immemorial monuments, and of those lying unsung in their tombs "

If we turn to the latest phase, we find there is no aspect of German Byronism which cannot be paralleled in England. Just as Klabund sought solace in colourful

visions of the East, so also did James Elroy Flecker. Walter de la Mare and Charles Morgan, creator of the Byronic Lord Sparkenbroke, are as death-haunted as Rilke. The verse of Wilfrid Owen and Siegfried Sassoon revealed as faithfully as Remarque's novel, not only the horror, but the boredom and futility of the trenches. The heterogeneousness of England's post-War pessimism is indeed as bewildering as Germany's. An older man like C. E. Montague was entitled to chronicle his *Disenchantment*; while Aldous Huxley and Noel Coward, more unlicensed in their irony, bespeak a generation, inured from adolescence to topsyturvydom. In Germany, the grotesque frolics of some recent writers have been frowned upon by the new régime. English youth has found the critics of an older, Liberal epoch, no less censorious. Only occasionally, a more versatile genius like H. G. Wells has probed the foundations of modern levity and indifference. *The Anatomy of Frustration* (1936), is a survey undertaken both with detachment and compassion—a rare conjunction—and one that is now hardly possible in Germany.

In England, Byron is regarded to-day as a legend rather than as a major poet, but it would seem that, as in Germany, the discriminating still feel the vitality of his influence. Much of Aldous Huxley's work is steeped in Byronism. Maurice Spandrell, in *Point Counter Point*, is perhaps the most absorbing single study of a Byronic figure in modern English literature. In verse, too, Byronic inspiration is still alive. As late as 1937, Humbert Wolfe, in his *Don J. Ewan*, has tried to revitalize the Byronic epic.

It would be tempting to prolong our account of the fate of the Byronic attitude in England; but, such analysis would hardly conform to the scope of this

book. However, the slight sketch given in this chapter may help to clarify the main divergences between the English and the German approach to Byronic problems.

Comparisons between English and German Byronic literature in the early phases prior to 1850, are largely nugatory. Because of the success of Carlyle's animadversions, there is, indeed, little English material to compare with the German. Emily Brontë's Heathcliff, the greatest Byronic figure of them all, was looked on askance for several decades. English Byronism, officially taboo, had become the preserve of second-rate writers, whose pastiches were monotonously sensational, and sentimental. In Germany, also, Grabbe cultivated the grotesque-sensational, but, like Lenau and Heine, he was a man of indisputable genius. Such Byronic work as this trio produced—if we except Heine's feeble dramas—was superior to most contemporary English writings in the same vein. Yet, in its painful self-dissection and surfeit of sadistic horrors, it contained elements of disintegration, the original fount of Byronic idealism was running dry. Pückler-Muskau, who survived all his contemporaries, stands alone, too, in the heartiness of his Titanism. As a man, if not as a writer, he resembles that equally tempestuous orientalist, and Byron-enthusiast, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. On the enigmatic similarity between Disraeli and Lassalle, we have dwelt sufficiently.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a wide gulf began to separate English and German Byronism. In England, Decadent Byronism was associated with the Neo-Romantic movement and the new æstheticism. The English Byronic type of the 'nineties was thus essentially a dandy, a *poseur*. He was obsessed by problems of style. Though equally problematical at bottom, and equally consumed with inner fire, he was, withal, more

decorous in expressing passion and despair than his Romantic precursor. But, in Germany, not even in Munich or Berlin, was there a group of reputable writers exactly analogous to Wilde's coterie. There were aesthetes. There were Neo-Romantics. But they, since their ideals were largely Parnassian, and therefore less emotional than that of their London brethren, would have scorned to embrace the unrestrained Byronic creed. Stefan George would no doubt have deemed Byron a vulgarian, just as Byron would have seen in George an affected mystagogue. Repelled by the mumbo-jumbo that encompassed the George-circle, as by the lifeless perfection of its adherents' art, the Byronic spirits of the 'nineties found a more congenial atmosphere in the oddly emotional brand of German Naturalism. It is this association with Naturalism, which gives German Byronism of *fin de siècle* its distinctive flavour. The heroes of Schlaf's novels talk aesthetics as an after-thought. They are more concerned with biology. Like Kaiser, they seek to realize the New Man.

To dream of Utopias, and the self-redemption of mankind, is a not unworthy pursuit. While Schlaf was writing his trilogy, a host of English writers, with Shaw and Wells in the van, were indulging in similar speculations, but to more purpose. What dwarfs the German sociological novelists seem, when compared with Nietzsche! And how pitifully inadequate Schlaf's trilogy appears, measured by the standard of Wells's *New Machiavelli*, *Marriage*, and *The Research Magnificent*! Never was the muddle-headedness, which all too often serves for deep-thinking amongst "philosophical" German writers, more patent. Conradi, Schlaf, and their numerous camp-followers, fell fair and square between the two stools of art and science. On the one hand they

felt drawn towards the ideal of "art for art's sake," but lacking the genius and wise self-limitation of men like Flaubert and Wilde, they were moved to adulterate their Byronic frenzies with incongruous social theories. These theories were as inherently trite, as their expression was poor. Carl Hauptmann and Wilhelm Bolsche excepted, their advocates lacked the scientific training and patient research of the Fabians. True, they all had an inkling of philosophy, but a metaphysician is apt to cut a sorry figure in a world distraught by economic urgencies.

Just as German Naturalists of short vision confused the latter-day descendant of the Byronic Hero with the embryo of the New Man, so they were tempted to identify the Fatal Woman with the emancipated woman. Again, this amalgamation was of profit to neither party a suffragette forfeited sympathy when she resorted to the untamed ferocity of the Fatal Woman, while the Fatal Woman, intoning the slogans of the suffragette, was not a spectacle to arouse tragic pity and fear. Even Heinrich Mann, whose study of Romance literatures might have taught him better, drew Violante von Assy as a blue-stocking and political intrigante, before finally unmasking her as a sex-ridden Bacchante. Perhaps this transition is true to life. What is certain is that a strangely composite figure like Violante, tends to lose verisimilitude when drawn by writers of lesser calibre than Heinrich Mann.

For all the lapses of the pseudo-Naturalists, it would be wrong to assume that modern German Byronic literature is everywhere inferior to the English. It is common knowledge that German writers are on the whole, less careful in form than the English or the French. Reviewed *en masse*, the works considered in these chapters are stylistically inferior to their non-

German counterparts. But their intrinsic psychological interest is as great; sometimes too, their arguments are more gnostic. On the rare occasions when the style is adequately fused with its burden of thought, a beauty and a profundity are attained, unique in modern European letters. There is nothing quite so grandiose in modern English literature as the attempts, appraised in conjunction, of Hofmannsthal, Rilke, and Thomas Mann, to wrestle with the spectre of Death. And it would be difficult to find a theory of Byronism so suggestive and stimulating as Hermann Hesse's.⁹

If we must accord German writers the lugubrious distinction of being on a more intimate footing with *Mors*, we can certainly claim that recent English novelists, like Huxley and Maugham, have eclipsed the Germans in their tributes to *Momus*. Huxley's satire is not only more merciless than the pleasantries of a German ironist like Klabund, it is better documented. If one chooses, one may sneer at Huxley for writing with the *Encyclopædia Britannica* at his elbow. But if the alternative to his caustic pedantry is the trite, elegiac vapourings of a poet like Albert Ehrenstein, then Huxley's method would seem at least to have the advantage of possessing greater body and substance. Moreover, as his recent work has demonstrated, knowledgeable destruction may well prove the prelude to knowledgeable construction. No German Huxley made himself heard prior to 1933. Now, even if he arose, it seems likely that his message would remain unheard. Perhaps, even so combative a mind as Huxley's could not have reached full maturity amid the turmoil of post-War Germany. Or possibly, *Brockhaus* is less readable than the *Encyclopædia Britannica*! Whatever its cause, the puerility of modern German satire is to be deplored.

It is a pity, too, that something of the refreshing objectivity of Somerset Maugham's medical approach to humanity, could not have been instilled into the lucubrations of German doctors. Benn's piling up of horrors is as stridently juvenile, as Carossa's faith in the restorative powers of Nature is amiably naive, to sound the Wordsworthian strain in the world that science has revealed to us, is to be guilty of an anachronism. . . . Truth, if it has no plurality, must lie somewhere between Benn's ugly realism, and Carossa's modest idealism; and we can reasonably assume that it will approximate to the golden mean of a Somerset Maugham—for, even in his pessimism, the Englishman generally retains his racial sobriety. When he enters a consulting-room, Maugham does not exclaim in disgust, nor does he evade the disagreeable "There was neither good nor bad there. There were just facts. It was life." How immeasurably improved the larger part of German Byronic literature would be, if all maudlin embroidery of the "facts" were excised! Like Maugham, the puny disciples of Nietzsche might then realize that it is possible to arrive beyond Good and Evil, not only through verbose, dialectical acrobatics, but also, with no more elaborate an apparatus than that of a detached eye.

With the advent of the Nazi régime, German literature was brought forcibly to the cross-roads. Byronism was expelled, as unmanly. In England, too, there have been tokens of late that post-War high jinks and hysteria are going out of fashion. Already, Huxley's earlier work seems slightly *démodé*. But it is improbable that the English love of satire and social criticism will be replaced by an interest, artificially stimulated, in the literature of *Blut und Boden*. For one thing, doctrinaire persuasion in this field would be superfluous. From *Piers Plowman*

to H. J. Massingham, and Mary Webb, there has always existed in England a sane literature of the soil, pleasantly free from chauvinism. It has been written by students of nature rather than by patriots. Thanks to this direct approach to the good earth, English literature has been uniquely enriched. By contrast, Germany, despite Hermann Löns, and for all her *Heimatsdichtung*, her wealth of provincial idylls, can boast no Gilbert White or Izaak Walton. Moreover, the English ear is quick to detect any false raciness of style, and the English satirist soon deflates false ardour in local patriotism. That same English humour which is the saving grace of Huxley's mordant wit, has also tempered the asperities of the rustic novel. Thus the urban literati who write turgidly of their nostalgia for the open fields, have been as amusingly lampooned as have the jaded English Byronists. It is doubtful whether the *Blut und Boden* school in Germany, would respond to a delicious parody such as Stella Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm*.

We have now reviewed the chief differences between the German and the English approach to Byronism—differences which are ultimately explicable, only on the basis of national character. It remains to appraise the influence for good and evil of Byronism as a whole, and so, to ascertain whether its complete rejection by Nazi officialdom is justifiable.

It may well be that in 1933, the last, post-War phase of Byronism was played out in Germany—that the pendulum was in any case bound to swing, after years of a sickening dubiety, towards a less questioning acceptance of life. Lachrymose elegies, and revolutionary rant that might once have been pregnant with meaning, now sounded trite, and effeminate. We have seen to what bathos the Byronic spirit had finally been

reduced. But no impartial observer who traces the influence of Byron in Germany, from Goethe to Gustav Sack, through all the literary vicissitudes of a crowded century, can fail to perceive that it engendered, together with much that was second-rate, a considerable quantity of eager, and sometimes closely reasoned, prose and verse. The greatest benefits conferred by Byronism were, however, psychological rather than literary. Byronism acted as a powerful stimulus on the growth of self-consciousness in the nineteenth century. The attainment of self-consciousness is necessarily attended by growing pains, yet the goal would seem to justify any discomfort suffered in the process.

The "self-conscious" person is often a rebel and a free-thinker. As such, he is unamenable to the discipline imposed by the totalitarian state, and is therefore liable to persecution. Uncompromising persecution is however far from justifiable, even from the standpoint of the dictator himself. A good deal of the energy that went to the making of the Byronic literary tradition in Germany, might have been profitably canalized by the new régime. Long before the advent of Hitler, Byronic writers had attacked the weaknesses of the German *Gymnasien*. Wedekind had fought for a less prurient acknowledgement of sex. Heym had revealed the dangers of urbanization. And the career of a writer like Hans Carossa, shows how a man may eradicate his less amiable Byronic foibles, and turn to face life with renewed zest.

A Nazi spokesman would no doubt justify attacks on all Byronic forms of art, on the grounds that they may lead to nihilism. But "nihilism" is a desperately elastic term. In the eyes of Byronic weaklings, it is a philosophy which reduces the whole universe to a

joyless nullity; as such, it is difficult to defend. A genius like Nietzsche, however, sees nihilism as a catharsis, which will render the world fit for the superman. He only devaluates the existing dispensation, in order to clear the ground for new values. For this reason, too, Nietzsche and his intellectual kin, condemn Schopenhauer's interpretation of Buddhism, which completely overlooks the positive spirituality latent in oriental nihilism. Buddhism is not so much concerned with cosmic devaluation, as with cosmic *transvaluation*—or pure poetry. "To fashion stars out of dog-dung, that is the Great Work!" Few of us can aspire to such heights of mystical intuition, but, at the least, we need not reject nihilism out of hand; we can endeavour to employ it, like Huxley, as an aid to keeping a sense of proportion.

Byronism is, for the moment, extinct in Germany. It is on the wane in England. This may be a symptom that our civilization has become retrograde. For one thing is certain: fundamentally, Byronism is not a mere token of decay. The degree of melancholia in an age is in almost exact proportion to its affirmation of life! Byronism is the obverse face of progress, but not its antipode. Byronic ferment has always accompanied a quickening in man's evolution. The Renaissance is as inconceivable without Hamlet, as the French Revolution without Byron. And it was Nietzsche who perceived the affinity between Hamlet and the Dionysiac Greek. The un-Byronic ages are those of slothful content, when men discern neither the summits of existence, nor its perilous abysses.

If Byronism is momentarily under a cloud, there can nevertheless be no doubt that it will suffer a vast geographical expansion in the future. America already parades her Babbits and Arrowsmiths. Even from remote

outposts of civilization, such as the Sudan, come reports of the widespread, and extremely Byronic, disaffection felt by the natives, when they first suffer the shock of western culture. The testimony is clear *Byronism is the glorious penalty of awareness.*

NOTES

1. In *The Two Races of Men*, Lamb inveighs against an inveterate borrower (Coleridge?), who has failed to return a copy of his beloved Fulke Greville. If only the fellow had made off with some other booty!—"Was there not Zimmermann on *Solitude*?"

2. Cp the works of J. G. Robertson and James Boyd, mentioned in the Select Bibliography

3. F. Jacobsen, *Briefe an eine deutsche Edelfrau über die neuesten englischen Dichter*, Altona, 1820

4. Nietzsche points out, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that the Dionysiac liberation from the fetters of individuality "*sich am allerersten in einer bis zur Gleichgültigkeit, ja Feindseligkeit gesteigerten Beeinträchtigung der politischen Instinkte fühlbar macht*"

5. For a full analysis of Lassalle's last love affair, the English reader may be referred to George Meredith's *The Tragic Comedians*, a work largely based on the Memoirs of Helene von Racowitza, née Donniges

6. *The Amber Witch* was translated by Lady Lucia Duff Gordon, and is now available in "The World's Classics" Series, published by the Oxford University Press. *Sidonia von Bork* was rendered into English by Lady Wilde, Oscar Wilde's mother; William Morris printed a *de luxe* edition, while Burne-Jones executed an elaborate costume-portrait of Sidonia

7. "Eternity conceived as existing apart from life is life's enemy"—Thus Aldous Huxley, in his *Pascal*. All Huxley's trenchant criticism of the great French Death-worshipper, applies equally well, *mutatis mutandis*, to Rilke.

8 Translated by Basil Creighton, 1929 Hesse's *Narziss und Goldmund* has been translated by Geoffrey Dunlop as *Death and the Lover*, 1932.

9 Aldous Huxley has, however, championed much the same philosophy, in several of his novels, and more especially, in the essay *One and Many*.

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